

Community development in El Mirador,
Nicaragua, post Hurricane Mitch:
NGO involvement and community cohesion

A thesis submitted for the degree
of Masters of Arts in Geography
at the University of Canterbury

by

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2006

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ABSTRACT

In October of 1998 the category 5 storm, Hurricane Mitch, struck Nicaragua, leaving in its wake mass destruction and devastation. Numerous aid agencies and social organisations poured funds into the country to assist in emergency disaster relief efforts, and to rebuild the lives of those who lost their homes and livelihoods (*damnificados*). El Mirador in the city of Matagalpa is one example of the many communities built with aid monies after Hurricane Mitch. This thesis uses qualitative data constructed from in-depth interviews with participants (community members in El Mirador) to understand the level of successful community development that has been achieved, the ability for longer term sustainability as a result of community development strategies, and the areas in which community development has failed.

Through an examination of the relationship the community has with the NGO the Communal Movement, the question of long term sustainability becomes important. The most telling indicator (that development practice is unsustainable) is the unproductive coping mechanisms of community members as aid and social organisations withdraw leaving members with ineffective social networks and at times uncooperative behaviour. Added into this is the arrival of new members into the community, and squatters, who have only added to the feelings of segregation already apparent, as a ‘them and us’ mentality develops.

This study provides a detailed case specific analysis of community development through disaster relief efforts. It highlights some of the consistent, broad inefficiencies as well as more location and situation specific difficulties of community development. Moreover, it adds to the growing body of literature researching how disaster relief can become more effective and sustainable in the longer term.

PREFACE

In 1999 at the age of 15 I travelled on a student exchange to Costa Rica where I lived for a year, learning to speak Spanish, to eat rice and beans, and to dance the salsa. It is from this experience that I developed a real passion for Central America and the people who live there. In 2004 I returned to Costa Rica to conduct my honours research project in the community I had lived in on my student exchange. It was a profound experience not only because I was returning to the place I considered my second home, but because I had the opportunity to tell the stories of people whom I both respected and admired.

In July 2005 I arrived at the University of Canterbury with the intention of completing my Master's in Geography. It was at this point that I became acquainted with Dr. Julie Cupples, who shared in my passion for Central America. Together we decided that a return to the field site of her PhD research could provide an interesting project. As such I began developing and researching the community of El Mirador in Matagalpa, Nicaragua.

During my initial research stages Hurricane Katrina struck the state of Louisiana in the South Eastern United States. The devastation and loss of life caused by Katrina was a direct reminder to me of the position that so many of my participants had been in when Hurricane Mitch struck Nicaragua. So too were critiques of emergency management plans and systems, and the ongoing questions relating to the appropriateness of emergency relief initiatives and funding. For me the advent of Katrina really brought home the importance of my research and how the outcomes I reach may be useful in future disaster relief and community development planning.

The most challenging and rewarding part of this research was spending 6 weeks living in a Nicaraguan home, mingling and interacting with a variety of people. This is an experience I will treasure forever, and I hope that in the future I have the opportunity to visit Nicaragua again.

In particular I would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of various people, without whom the completion of this project would not have been possible. Firstly I would like to thank my supervisors Dr. Julie Cupples and Dr. Lee Thompson for their support and advice throughout the project. Also my sincere thanks to all of the staff in the Geography department at the University of Canterbury.

I would particularly like to extend my appreciation to the community members at El Mirador for allowing me to understand a little about their lives. Also to the Communal Movement who made my trip to Nicaragua extremely memorable, and whose experience and help throughout my stay went above and beyond the call of duty.

Additionally I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me throughout this process. In particular my mother (Judy Tomlinson) for her financial and emotional support during this year. I would also like to acknowledge my fellow Master's students who made my time at Canterbury interesting and enjoyable. In particular Catherine Tisch and Luke Versteeg who experienced the challenge and excitement of this year with me.

Finally I would like to thank NZAID for their financial support in the form of a postgraduate scholarship, without which none of this research would have been possible.

THANKYOU

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Alejandro

Alejandro and his family arrived 5 years ago to the community. He originally came from Guanuca where he had lived together, in a single room along with his brother, mother and father. Once he had married he purchased his family home. This was done cheaply as the original residents had needed to sell the home urgently. The remainder of his family soon followed with his brother and his parents both purchasing homes in El Mirador shortly after he did.

What happened is that I was living together with myself, my brother, my father and my mother. We were renting, but the house was not our own. As such, when I married I saw the opportunity here, and since the house was cheap, we bought it.

Alejandro is the sole income earner in his household. He is employed as a secondary teacher in a school 2 hours away from El Mirador. Thus, daily, 5-6 days a week he travels for over 4 hours to and from his job. He did comment that when he was required to work late, he often just stayed the night in that community as the distance to travel was too large. He has two sons who both live with him and his wife in their home in El Mirador, and attend the local school. His family has been involved in many of the more recent projects in El Mirador; however he often has to pay someone else to participate on his behalf as he is usually working when the projects are taking place.

Gabriela

Gabriela is one of the most prominent community leaders in El Mirador having been involved in the community since its inception. She lives with 7 other people in her home, including: her 4 daughters, her eldest daughter's husband and her two grandsons. She is the sole provider for all 7 household members and is employed as a school teacher in the local school. She gained employment in this occupation after undergoing teacher's training aided by the Communal Movement.

Much as is the case for most members of this community Gabriela arrived as a *damnificada* of Hurricane Mitch, but quickly became an important figure in the making of this community.

When we came here we were *damnificados* of the hurricane. As such the communal movement aided us in the building of these houses...In this [project] I was the coordinator of the *directiva*, as such I had to work very hard...There are various members [other members of the directive] as such we had to coordinate the community members and the construction together with members of the communal movement.

Gabriella's perspectives on life and changes in the community are unique as she has been a key player in the majority of development initiatives in the community. In fact some of the initiatives have been developed from her own ideas about how the community should develop and what its needs are. Her home is more like a drop in centre which is always open to community members wishing to consult with her on various issues. At the time of my visit Gabriella was volunteering her time and teaching skills in a free adult literacy programme in the community.

Isabella

At the age of 22 Isabella, and her two children were forced to swim for their lives from their original home, which was inundated with flood waters triggered by Hurricane Mitch. Isabella described to me how she swam over the swollen river with her two small children, one in each arm. She recalls how at one stage she thought she may have to let go of her son, the eldest of her two children, but could not bring herself to do it. The family made it out alive. Isabella and her family were then housed in a Red Cross refuge, like many of the other *damnificados*, as they began to build their house in El Mirador.

Unlike many of the other *damnificados* Isabella had the support of her mother and father who were also victims of Hurricane Mitch and who currently live in the community as well. In fact Isabella's father is the most prominent male community leader in El Mirador and although now in his late 60's he still commands a high level of respect and gratitude from other community members for the role he has played in developing the community.

We (Isabella and her parents) were some of the founders who worked constructing the first houses, and the communal house which was a kitchen for the children as well as the place where classes were given, I was given the responsibility of looking after various children as their mothers had to work.

Isabella like most members of the community takes great pride in the work and effort she put into constructing her own house and still considers it one of her greatest achievements.

Marcella

As a *damnificada* of Hurricane Mitch, Marcella came to the community and helped to build her own home. She still lives here with her 6 children aged 23, 20, 18, 17, 13 and 8. She is a single mother and the sole income earner for her family.

Yes I work every day in the markets, because I am the mother of the family, I have 6 children and I am the father and the mother for them.

Marcella's 7 day a week employment in the markets consists of operating a small outside stall filled with various items of clothing for men, women and children. In her spare time not only does she complete jobs around her home, but she also sews clothing to sell in her stall. She acquired her sewing skills from a project organised by the Communal Movement, where various women in the community were selected to learn how to sew in the hope that they would continue with this enterprise and use it as a means to generate incomes for their families. As well as this she also repairs clothing for community members at a small cost, as a means to supplement her income.

Marcella is a key community member who is relied on to liaise with the Communal Movement about activities and projects in the community. And although she no longer holds any direct positions of power (due primarily to her working commitments) such as a place on the *directiva*, she is still generally approached for advice and guidance in the community. Moreover, as she works at the markets she is often asked to bring back goods for other community members on her return trips, so saving others the 30 minute or longer trip. For this service she receives a small amount of money or a small portion of the goods she purchases on their behalf. More importantly she is able to keep in contact with community members despite having to spend less time in the community and more time working in recent years.

María

María has 5 children aged 15, 13, 9, 4 and 7 months. She also lives with her husband, her sister and her sister's husband; a total of 9 people living in one household. They all originally lived in the community of Alberto Rodolfo Lopez along the river's edge. When Hurricane Mitch struck all of the family members were in bed asleep, apart from María's husband who was up speaking to a colleague. He alerted the family and evacuated them as the river levels swelled and began to enter their home. They all evacuated the house immediately, leaving behind all of their clothing and personal belongings (besides those on their backs). The house and all of their belongings were lost in the flooding caused by the hurricane; but the family was just happy to have escaped.

We were in bed asleep when the river came in [the house]...yes, we lost it, but thanks to god we got out.

It was at this point that they were put in touch with the Communal Movement who in turn encouraged María and her family to participate in the El Mirador project. As María's husband worked full time as a teacher, it was she who had to contribute extensively to the completion of the house. The family moved to El Mirador on the 7th November 1999. She considers herself and her family to be some of the founding members of the community, and she still carries much responsibility. She is part of the *directiva*, a group who act as community leaders, organising projects, activities and meetings, and is extensively involved in most aspects of community affairs.

María Jose

As a *damnificada* of Hurricane Mitch, María Jose arrived in El Mirador in late 1998 having lost her home and all of her possessions. María Jose and her family quickly made a life for themselves in El Mirador, becoming involved in various projects and educational activities in the community. Her eldest two daughters aided by projects through the Communal Movement are now a teacher and police officer. Many other community members commented on how successful the two girls were and hoped that their own children would be given the opportunity to achieve such success. In particular they noted the importance of the policewoman in the community as it made many of the people feel safe, since crime levels in the community had been on the increase in recent years. They hoped that her presence would deter the continuance of some of this crime.

Before I lived in the community 28 de Augusto, I lived close to the river. I lost everything including my house and my clothes, but I came here with my children and my husband.

María Jose admitted that it was a real experience building her home with her own two hands and she said that although it took a long time, she learnt a lot from the experience. She now has 8 children and her eldest 3 children also helped in the building of the house, an experience they also enjoyed.

Mirian

Like most of the other members of El Mirador, Mirian was aided by the Communal Movement to come to the community. However she was not a *damnificada* of Hurricane Mitch instead she had recently become a single mother and was being evicted from her rented accommodation. She was eight months pregnant and unable to pay rent so the landlord of the rented home attempted to evict her. Mirian sought help from the Communal Movement who spoke to the landlord on her behalf and managed to get the landlord to agree to let Mirian stay until three weeks after the baby was born.

We lived in the community Walter Mendoza, but we did not have our own home. I was renting a house but it had no roof and I was pregnant with my son. We didn't have anywhere to live. As such, we went from one place to another but could not pay as I was pregnant and had no employment.

Mirian was invited to take part in the Communal Movement project, because although she was not a *damnificada* she was destitute; without a home, income and with very few possessions. Facing the prospect of not being able to support her children, Mirian relished the chance to join the Communal Movement project. She had to juggle with working on her home and caring for her young family on her own. However she quickly adapted to community life, taking part in many community projects.

She took part in the health training project offered by the communal movement and is now a *brigadista* for the community, visiting all of the houses in the community and spreading knowledge about how to prevent and treat illness. She admitted that at first it was a difficult job to get people to listen to the advice she was giving, but now she is well respected and trusted in the community.

Paola

Paola is the newest arrival to the community at El Mirador. She is the guardian of three children for her partner who is a *campesino*. The family only live in El Mirador during the school term, and when I met them they had been there for 3 months. Paola told me that the father of the family (her partner) had sold over half of his fields in the country to buy the home so that his three daughters could come to the city and have a good education. They chose to live in El Mirador because of its closeness to Matagalpa and the reputation of the local school.

It's very beautiful this community, also very close to the school and city. I look after these girls while their father works.

Paola receives a small allowance from her partner to purchase food, clothing and school supplies for the three girls. She has no employment in El Mirador at all but when she is home she aids her partner in looking after their fields. To date Paola knew no one in El Mirador and preferred to keep all of her doors and windows closed, because she felt uncomfortable at times. When the family was not using the home they cleared the house of almost all its possessions and kept it locked with padlocks. Although she admitted this security situation was not ideal, it was the only option available as she knew no one in the community or local area to look after the house. Paola said that she was too busy looking after the three children to go out and meet people and did not feel that this community or house were really her home. As such she admitted that she much preferred to keep to herself.

Rosa

Rosa has 8 children, 6 of whom live with her, as does the father of her children. They all live together in a two bedroomed home in El Mirador. Rosa's home was built by an Italian women's group known as La Luna who also built 5 other houses in the area. The houses were built with the intention that they were for single women without husbands who were victims of Hurricane Mitch. However, more recently Rosa has moved the father of her children in with her.

The houses built by La Luna are all attached by one main dividing wall between the living areas of paired houses. This was implemented so that home owners could not sell their homes without the permission of the secondary owner (next door neighbour). Rosa is employed in the informal workforce as a domestic worker and occasionally as a *frijolero* selling beans on the road side. The father of her children is employed working for the *alcaldia* working on street improvement projects.

Before coming to El Mirador Rosa lived in Guanuca along the river's edge.

There I was squatting when the water came in and it affected me significantly. I lost almost everything. Then after I was in a refuge, then I came back to the same area. It was at this point that the women from project Luna arrived and informed me that if I was to move to another location I would be better off and out of danger...because in that place where I was, there was flooding and all of the latrines overflowed. There was pollution from the markets, and pollution from the latrines, and I had barely given birth not even a month earlier to my daughter. So they brought me here, so 18 days after the hurricane I came to live here.

Sonia

The community of El Mirador is almost divisible into two distinctive halves, those that are Sandinistas and those that supported the Contras during the revolution of the 1980's. Sonia is the only member of a Contra household that I was able to interview. The houses of the Contras had been built before those of the Communal Movement project, however many of the houses lacked some of the features that the newer houses had. Sonia's home had only a dirt floor and the entrance way to the home was down a steep 12ft path which became almost impassable during the rainy season.

Sonia was the mother of 8 children who all lived in the El Mirador home with her and her husband. She had no employment, while her partner was employed informally in various jobs. She had very little education, to the point that she was almost totally illiterate. Generally she looked after the home, and cared for her children, 4 of whom were under the age of 5.

I like living here, it is very beautiful.

The family only had a few friends amongst the other people who live in the original Contra houses, but knew no one from the Communal Movement project. Nor did they participate in any of the projects introduced to the community by the Communal Movement. Sonia said that she had too many responsibilities in her own home and therefore could not participate in any of the projects.

Teresa

Teresa is the mother of three children aged 10, 4 and 3, and lives in El Mirador with her children and husband. Teresa is one of the more recent arrivals to El Mirador having only moved there 3 years ago. She came from the community Cinco de Junio where she had lived in her parent's home with her husband and two of her children. The family was given the opportunity to purchase the home in El Mirador as another family was leaving. They were aided in their purchase by members of the Communal Movement.

Both Teresa and her husband work in central Matagalpa, she works as a waitress in a casino and he is a cashier in a restaurant. Her children are also educated in Matagalpa central rather than at the local school in El Mirador. Teresa and her family have found it difficult to become part of the community at El Mirador and in many ways consider themselves alone and outsiders.

...there are many problems with various people. We don't get along. It is better to drop it because you have to live and work with these people.

Teresa is one of the few community members who employs someone to aid her with household chores and childcare. The woman she employs is part of a squatter settlement near the river in El Mirador. She admits that this woman and her family are some of the closest confidants she has in the community. Teresa indicates that she is not really part of the community and has little knowledge of how the community is organised. She describes herself as being separate but indicates her willingness to improve the community for all members, particularly those who are less fortunate than herself.

Chapter One

Introduction

“Anywhere it struck, Mitch would have been deadly.
But only poverty can explain why it was so deadly.”
-Washington Post 11/04/99 (Delaney and Schrader 2000)

Home is where the heart is!

The community of El Mirador is located just outside Central Matagalpa on the road between Matagalpa and Jinotega, in the municipality of Matagalpa (see figures 1.1 and 1.2). Matagalpa is located 130km to the north east of the capital city Managua (see figure 1.1), in the central mountainous zone (Cupples 2002). Elevations in the department vary between 700 and 1750 meters above sea level. The department has a tropical mountainous climate which sits around 30 to 34 degrees celsius in summer and lowers to between 18 and 28 degrees in winter (MCM 1999). The department and its 13 municipalities are home to over 500,000 residents making it the second most populated region in Nicaragua. The community of El Mirador evolved as a result of Hurricane Mitch, becoming a place for *damnificados* who had lost their homes and livelihoods (see participant profiles). While the word *damnificado* literally translated from Spanish means victim, for the majority of the residents at El Mirador being a *damnificado* means more than simply being a victim of disaster, instead it has inferences of repression, underdevelopment and poverty. The community is relatively isolated from Central Matagalpa, as it lies in a valley surrounded predominantly by agricultural lands. However it is important to understand both how the department of Matagalpa and the community of El Mirador function, and what some of the major concerns in the area are.

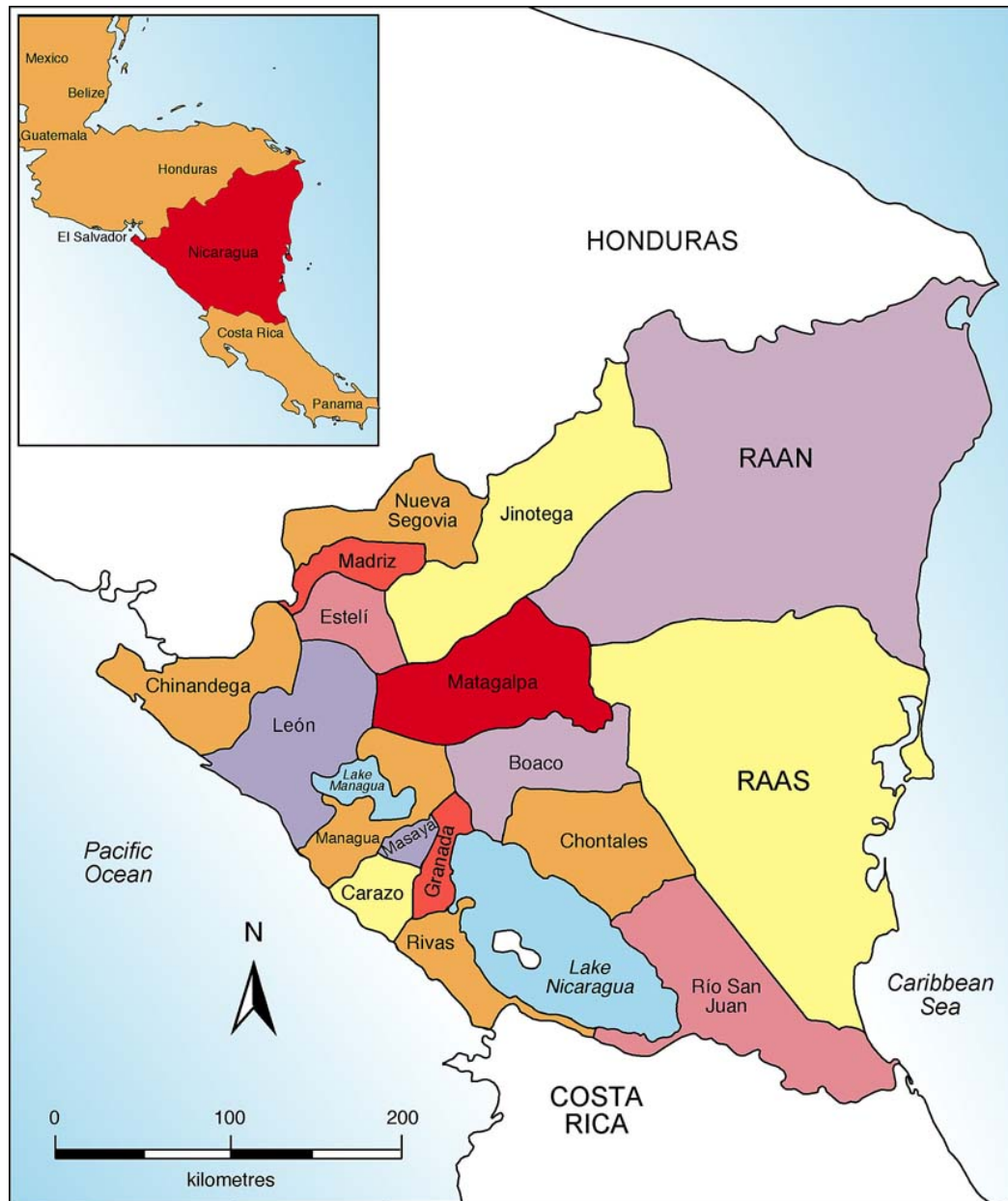


Figure 1.1

Map of the departments of Nicaragua
(Marney Brosnan 2006)

Isabella and her extended family came to El Mirador as damnificados after their homes had been destroyed beyond repair during Hurricane Mitch. Isabella swam out of her home with her two young children in her arms. After the Hurricane subsided Isabella and her extended family (including her mother and father) were placed in a Red Cross refuge. The family then moved to El Mirador where they became involved

in the building of the houses. Isabella recalls how she cared for the community's children during this time, as the mothers were at work constructing the homes. The home of Isabella is located at the entrance to the Communal Movement section of the community. She enjoys living in the community saying that it is a "quiet place to bring up children", and having her extended family within close proximity has helped her to feel like El Mirador is really her home. To earn a living Isabella works with her father selling milk and enchiladas along the main road to Jinotega. She works at this job seven days a week, in order to make enough money to support her family, as she is a single mother and the sole income earner in her household. The biggest concern she has about living in the community is the lack of health care facilities within close proximity, something she hopes may change in the future as the community continues to grow.

Disaster relief and development – A happy medium?

Hurricane Mitch, which struck Central America and the Caribbean in October 1998, was known as the "storm of the century" (Delaney and Schrader 2000). It caused a massive amount of damage resulting in a variety of human, social and economic losses. In Nicaragua alone 865,700 people were directly affected with US\$987 million in damage (CCER 1999; Delaney and Schrader 2000). Many attribute the high costs of Hurricane Mitch to a lack of development in Nicaragua; with inadequate public infrastructure and high levels of poverty. These problems are exacerbated by heavily centralised governance and increasing environmental degradation (Cupples 2004; Canner and Eames 1996). However the disaster was also seen as a possible catalyst for development transformation, as it made inequalities and vulnerabilities visible, so that they could be mitigated by relief efforts (Bradsahw 2002; Delaney and Schrader 2000; Mowforth 2001). In fact immediately after the disaster various government documents promoted the ideals of using aid funding and public cohesion to promote the transformation of Nicaragua; a message echoed by many Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's) working in the region (see for examples CCER 1999).

Recent disaster literature however, illustrates that development is consistently undermined or subverted by relief efforts which merely restore or reconstruct pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities (Anderson and Woodrow 1989; Bradshaw 2002; Peacock and Ragsdale 1997; Quarantelli 1999). This is because relief efforts have tended to focus on the short term stability of affected communities, and have been critiqued as being non-participatory, rushed and uncoordinated (Quarantelli 1999; Bradshaw 2002). As a result, relief efforts have fundamentally undermined development strategies, and in many cases caused further instability through aid dependence and reliance on outside agencies such as NGOs. Consistently literature indicates that development post disaster through relief funding can cause aid dependence, wherein, a community's level of co-operative functioning actually decreases below pre-disaster levels, meaning that often the basic survival of communities and their members are subject to the presence of outside agencies. This dependence is compounded by NGOs and social organisations having to tailor development programmes to meet emergency relief demands; when their previous primary function had been creating sustained long-term development projects. This shift in focus results in development goals being abandoned, while emergency relief measures become a priority (Anderson and Woodrow 1989). As Raganath (2000) states, NGOs often make the mistake of viewing disaster relief situations as simply damage and repair; rather than viewing the disaster as a consequence of deeper more fundamental elements of everyday life, such as poverty, vulnerability, environmental degradation, housing, income and employment insecurity. Accordingly NGO's run the risk of 'missing the point' when it comes to implementing disaster relief strategies which will provide for long term sustainable development solutions.

Nicaragua is a country portrayed as having a high level of susceptibility to natural hazards and disasters. Its geographic location means that it is particularly vulnerable to hurricanes¹ and volcanic activity². Between 1972 and 1996 it suffered from 11 disasters that seriously affected its socio-economic development (Rocha and Christoplas 2001). This vulnerability is compounded by high levels of environmental degradation and widespread poverty (NHRAIC 2005; Price 1994). Some authors have suggested that it is the tumultuous political history, and continued neo-liberal approach to social development which has increased poverty levels and disaster vulnerability (Anderson and Woodrow 1989; Rocha and Christoplos 2001). While

this is true, and many effects of a disaster are amplified in areas of underdevelopment, it is important to realise that disasters are far more complex than this simple definition. As Anderson and Woodrow (1989) suggest, when considering vulnerability our analysis must be inclusive of: the physical/material, the social/organisational and the motivational/attitudinal aspects of a community or population. Without a full assessment of vulnerability there remains the distinct possibility that vulnerability will merely be replicated or replaced by other vulnerabilities post disaster. To date research on Nicaragua has confirmed these concerns. Relief and reconstruction efforts post Mitch have become highly politicised and homogenised through the national government's agenda of pursuing major public works projects (Delaney and Schrader 2000). Such strategies ignored the heterogeneous nature of communities and led to a trade off of vulnerabilities rather than their overall decline. This is evidenced in the work of Bradshaw (2002) and Cupples (2002) who noted that rebuilding further away from the rivers altered the physical vulnerabilities of communities while at the same time increased economic vulnerability, as community members became distanced from employment opportunities and faced increasing transportation costs. This in turn resulted in various indirect effects including issues surrounding migration, food security, violence, community cohesion and contributions.

There is an emerging body of literature which indicates that analysis of the indirect impacts of relief efforts is essential to understanding why vulnerabilities persist (see Bradshaw 2000). It is argued that the most appropriate method of achieving this is by incorporating development studies with a consideration of culture and gender studies (Chua et al. 2000). The result is an approach which collectively enhances development practice by providing a fuller examination of social processes. This is particularly important as little development research analyses the long term implications of disaster relief as development practice, despite a strong interrelationship existing between the two. Such research is important as disasters are not just one off natural events exacerbated by underdevelopment and poverty, but are deeply rooted in the political, social, environmental, economic and cultural elements of everyday life.

Accordingly this research project revisits the community of El Mirador seven years after its creation (as a residential area for hurricane victims) to examine the levels of community development which have been achieved and how these have been changed or influenced by social and political capital, gender variables and NGO's. Thus the main aim of the project is to *analyse post-disaster rehabilitation and public transformation in a constructed community*. I intend to *analyse and evaluate public opinion of community cohesiveness and progression*, with the intention of developing information relating to community structure and development, as perceived through the views of a cross section of community members. I will also endeavour to *examine the extent of NGO participation in community development*. In doing this I will attempt to gauge levels of involvement community perceptions of this involvement, and the direct and indirect effects on development at a local scale. The hope is that this research will provide a working case specific example of development and disaster relief in practice, detailing both the pitfalls and achievements on a local level, while also illustrating the more general implications for long term development programmes.

The community in context

Matagalpa

Primarily coffee cultivation and processing form the economic backbone of the department; making it one of the most productive departments in the country. However basic salary levels throughout the department and in Nicaragua in general remain alarming low. A primary school teacher or nurse can earn, weekly, around C\$600 (NZ\$55.68¹) while the basic basket (group of standardised goods identified by the World Bank) of 53 products is calculated at C\$1,333 (NZ\$123.70*) (MCM 1999). In fact "Nicaragua is the third poorest country in the Americas, with a per capita gross national product of [US] \$453" (UNICEF 2006:1).

Through an examination of various social services; education, health, transport, communications and water; there are concerning disparities between Nicaragua and other countries in Latin America. Scholastically in the department of Matagalpa only

¹ Nicaragua to New Zealand exchange rate taken from
http://www.jasons.com/000500,....PG,1,0.mel#scroll_0:0 on 17/05/2006

20 out of every 100 children finish their primary education. Thus high levels of illiteracy exist; these have been calculated at 32% in the city and 46% in rural areas (MCM 1999). Despite a strong focus on education and educational resources by local and national government problems still persist as a result of families lacking sufficient economic means to maintain children in education³. On average males spend 10 years in the educational system while females spend 11 (World Bank 2003)

Major health concerns in Matagalpa include respiratory illness, acute diarrhoea, dengue fever, cholera and malaria (MCM 1999). Most of these occur as a result of poor sanitary conditions and lack of access to clean potable water (World Bank 2001). All of the illnesses are preventable with greater community development emphasis on preventative education systems in families and communities (MCM 1999).

Transportation and transport links are also vitally important in the department of Matagalpa. They provide a means of transport to citizens but also provide for the movement of goods. Matagalpa has transport links with most other departments and a large variety of transportation services exist including buses, taxis, shuttles and private motor vehicles. Unfortunately the poor state of roads in the region means that accidents are an extremely common occurrence (MCM 1999). The high costs of maintaining roads and increasing petrol prices mean that the price of transportation services is constantly on the increase.

While in recent years communication technology in the region has increased there still remain areas where there is insufficient or no coverage of telephone services. Even more recently the advent of cyber cafés where patrons can access high speed internet has meant that in the heavily populated areas such as Central Matagalpa, communication may be reached via the internet. However much of the communication technology remains too expensive for a large percentage of the population and many people simply do not have any access to the aforementioned services. In the period from 2000 – 2003 only 12 out of every 100 people in Nicaragua had direct access to a phone, with only 2 out of every 100 having internet access (UNICEF 2006).

Increasingly demand has been placed on local and national government to ensure access to clean potable water for all citizens in the department. Pockets of areas still remain without reasonable access to clean water; most of these are in the more rural areas of Matagalpa (World Bank 2003). There has also been demand from citizens to lay pipes to ensure that they can have running water in their homes. This is an on going campaign, and many citizens even those in the city centre, still have to travel several hundred meters or kilometres to fetch water.

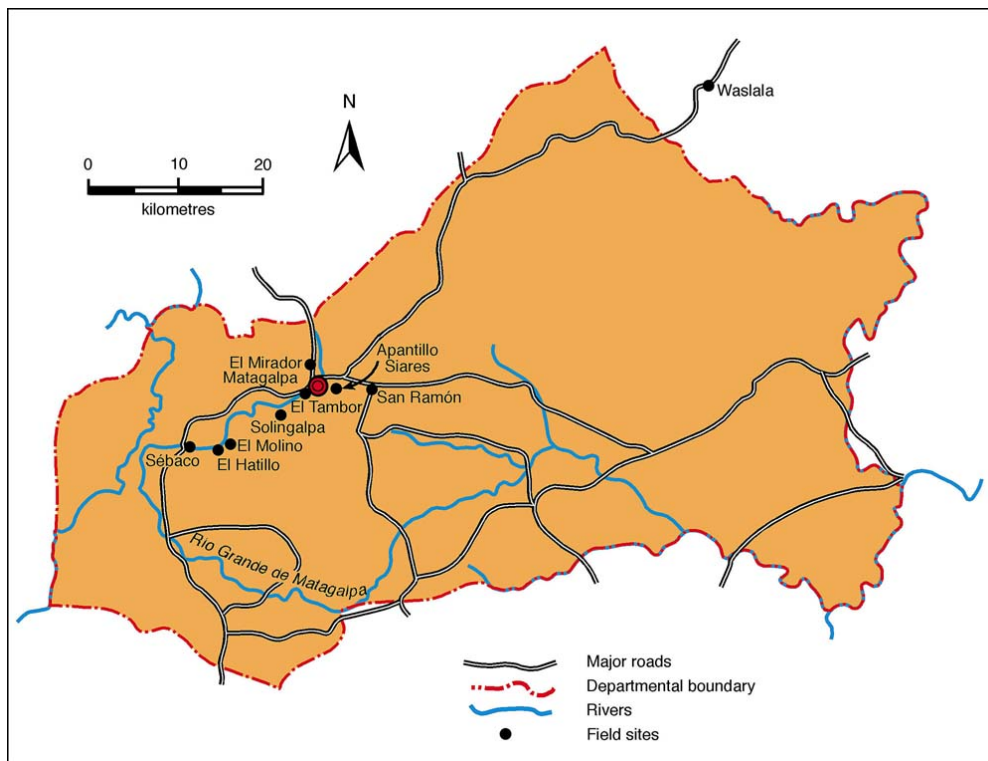


Figure 1.2

Map of department of Matagalpa showing El Mirador

Marney Brosnan 2006

El Mirador

The building of houses in El Mirador was the founding concept, and the point from which the entire community infrastructure has developed. Originally El Mirador began as a refugee camp with residents living in *champas* for over four months while they aided in the building of their new homes. The land on which the houses were built was given by the *alcaldia*, although this negotiation did not run smoothly and

some minor disagreements occurred as the land was already occupied by an agricultural collective (MCM 2000). Once land use arrangements had been made and contracts signed by the new residents, the building of the houses began, with ample participation by potential residents. The houses in El Mirador were built by various different groups such as El Sabadell/Communal Movement, La Luna and Club de Lions. One of the key points about all of these houses is that the homes are of a much higher calibre than those that participants had previously lived in (MCM 2001). The housing now fits into a definition of “adequate” as the materials used in the structure provide better shelter from the elements (World Bank definition see table 1.1 and 1.2). This is an important point as over half of the Nicaraguan population live in inadequate housing while over 40% in the urban central region where Matagalpa and El Mirador are located also live in inadequate housing, and these figures have remained relatively static.

Table 1.1

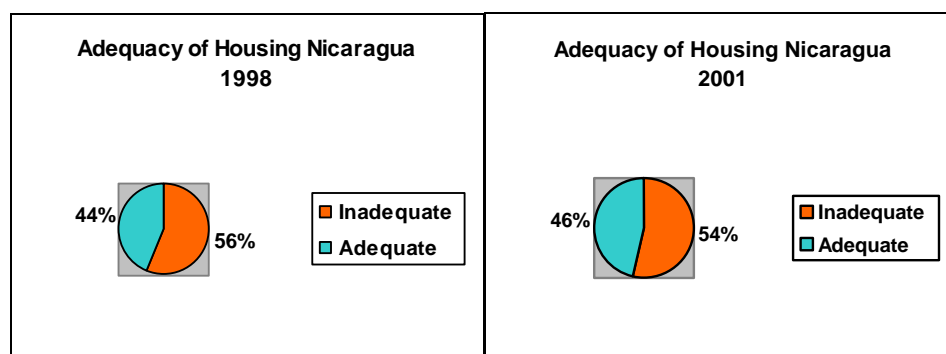
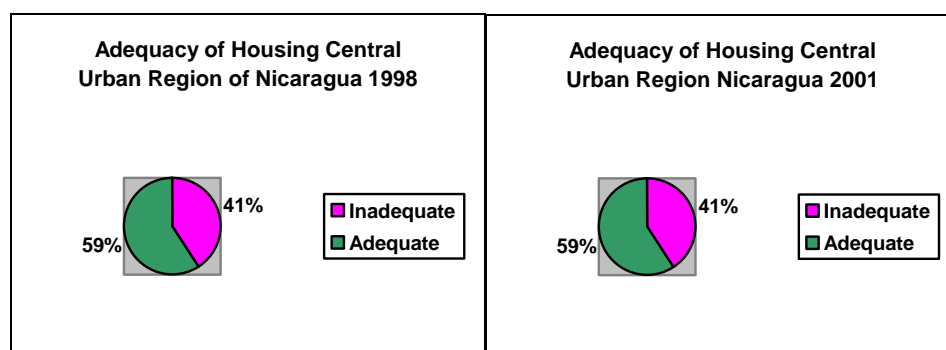


Table 1.2



Adapted from figures World Bank 2003 – Inadequate housing is an indication that walls (bamboo, cane or palm; wood; residues or rubble; and, other), floors (dirt and other) or ceilings (straw or similar; residues or rubble; and, other) are inadequate.]

The basic layout of all of the homes is depicted in figure 1.3 and a picture of the front of one of the houses in El Mirador is figure 1.4. The homes were built both by the residents and volunteers of various aid organisations. For many residents their own manual labour is a source of immense pride, and they often reflect on the physical difficulty and joy of creating their dwelling with their own two hands. Development research indicates the importance of encouraging the intended recipients to become involved in the building process, as a means of ensuring that you meet the needs of the community and impart important skills which can be used in later development initiatives (Raganath 2000). These initial skills were then capitalised on with the building of the latrines, and many residents have added rooms or partition walls to increase the size of their homes. The most extensive additions were those by María and her family, who had added a large kitchen dining room, two extra bedrooms, a small *pulpería* at the front of the home and a large covered balcony, almost filling their entire 20m² section.

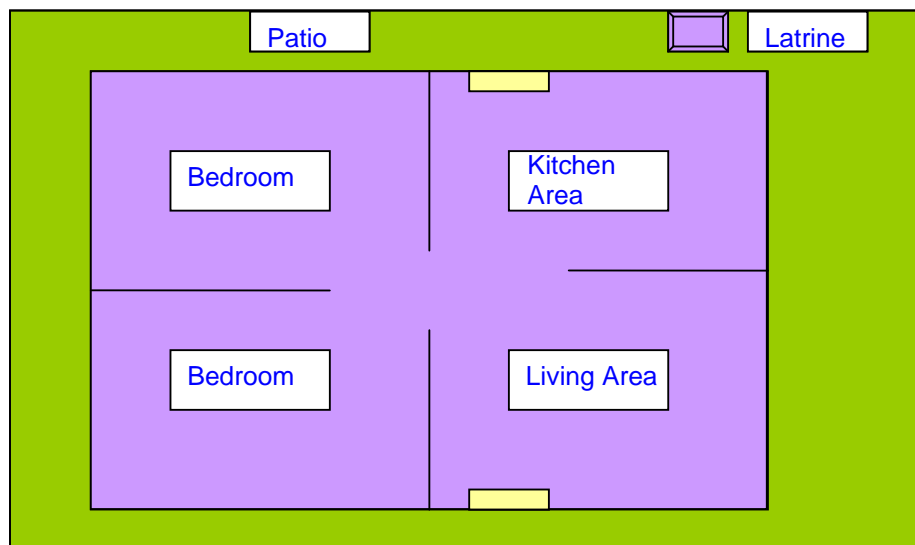


Figure 1.3

Basic House Layout El Mirador
(Rewa Tomlinson 2006)



Figure 1.4

Front Entrance to home El Mirador

(Rewa Tomlinson 2006)

After the completion of the houses latrines were built in the patio area of each home and instructions were given on how to use the latrines to improve sanitation (see figure 1.5). The latrine project was open to all community members and encouraged participants to think about emerging environmental waste concerns.



Figure 1.5

Latrines in the patios of residents at El Mirador

(Rewa Tomlinson 2006)

Unfortunately the implementation of latrines in the community has not seen continued community development. In fact many residents have returned to not using the latrines for their intended purpose and instead prefer to defecate in their patios. Many dislike the latrines because they attract rats and snakes and they are scared that these animals may harm them while utilising the latrine. Others dislike how they flood when there are heavy rains and thus choose not to use them at all. Some simply see their purpose as wasteful and instead use the space like an extra room for storing goods.

The latrine project was followed shortly by the construction of retaining walls or *muros* to stop earth falling and undermining homes during periods of heavy rainfall. The aim of the *muros* was to provide soil stability in the area thus decreasing *aguas negras*. The instability of soil has also proved problematic in the development of the small patio area allocated to each home. This point is of particular importance as individual residents livelihood success often relies on the ability to cultivate and make productive, small patio areas attached to the home. For the majority of residents the

steep terrain means that only hardy trees will prosper in this setting. This is further compounded by the strong winds and heavy rains which consistently move soil, making it impossible for ground crops to survive.

They also showed us how to grow family gardens. We were working [on them] but the rains came. The water from above fell down below and everything we had sown was lost with the earth and water, or it died. There are retaining walls above, but since they are not very big they don't help us. We had plantain, we also had yucca, we sowed beetroot, cucumber, chayote and everything was lost. Also I have (valeriana) and various medicinal plants, but with the earth knackered the plants can't resist the water. As such we brought black earth from other parts in, but the same earth from up above there fell, meaning that the earth is no longer viable. (Interview Rosa, February 2006)

Despite continued failures in planting their own small crops, many still persist with planting crops which are unsuccessful in these growing conditions. This is also compounded by NGOs and various other groups donating such unsuitable crops free of charge to many residents. Directly in front of the residential housing area are large tracts of flat land, some of which has been dedicated for community use. Many of the residents suggested that the work involved in cultivating this land was enormous and that their time was better spent picking or growing in other communities where communal gardens had already been established. Others had at times made suggestions about the usage and types of crops which could be grown on the tracts of land, but suggested that there was a lack of enthusiasm from other community members to invest in and partake in such a project, partially due to the unpredictability of soil conditions in the area, and the inability to gauge the level of success crops would have in the market place.

On the 8th July 2000 the community was officially inaugurated (MCM 2000). Throughout the seven years since its conception the community has changed significantly. The original communal kitchen which fed children under the age of 12 in the community closed in 2003 (Interview with Auxiliadora Romero), as issues of food insecurity were not so pertinent anymore. There was also little need for this space as a meeting place or education centre, because the new school *Escuela de Sabadell* took on this role. A school according to Batten (1957: 99) can be used by

agencies as a place to “instruct or educate the people in what to do, or in how to organise themselves, or in the skills they need to reach their new objectives”, as such it is central to community development. The school in El Mirador is no exception, acting as a kindergarten, primary and secondary school, meeting place, adult education centre, and generally as a shared community space. Organisations working within the community use the school as a neutral space, to develop community programmes and to continue to encourage education and participation by community members.

The school was a collaborative effort between the Communal Movement and El Sabadell which began as an initial concept in July 2000, and was built between June and November of 2001 (MCM 2001). The school is an important and obvious indicator of physical community development as it is now government funded and a central part of the functioning of the community, with the majority of community children in attendance. It is also an indicator of the increasing number of people living in the area, and the growing understanding of the benefits of education, as school roles and participation levels are on the increase. Moreover it functions as a recognised meeting space a place for ideas, growth and development as a community. Thus it is a piece of infrastructure which facilitates the growth of social capital, networks and community relations. Despite its positive features the school is also often a point of friction in the community, as resources are stolen⁴, the school grounds are misused, and people become disillusioned at the increasing costs of education, and the sacrifices which have to be made in order to educate their children. One example is Paola’s husband who had sold half of the land he owned in the country in order to have enough money to purchase the El Mirador home where she lived with his three daughters, as he had wanted them to receive a good education.

It’s just my husband brought this house for these girls.
Because here in the city there are more opportunities for
education, and the school here is good. (Interview Paola,
February 2006)



Figure 1.6

Picture of the school in El Mirador

Foreground pre-school, background primary and secondary school

(Rewa Tomlinson 2006)

Some of the original community members have sold their homes and moved away allowing new members to move into the community. Squatters have also become a feature of the community. The arrival of new citizens makes for an interesting dynamic in the community, with a population who exhibit both confliction and cooperation. These relationships are discussed more extensively in Chapter Four. The main roads and transportation links into and out of the community have also been improved, although they are still far from ideal (MCM 2001). Access into the community of El Mirador is limited in terms of transportation. Buses and *Urbanos* only stop at the top of the community meaning that residents must walk up and down a steep hill to reach their homes. Besides this, many of the residents had originally lived in close proximity to the city centre before moving to El Mirador; accordingly they now faced increased transportation costs as El Mirador is located just outside of the city centre. Teresa explained the burden of these increased transportation costs suggesting:

No I don't like it, because it is long, and there is no access to the services of an *Urbano*, or to a taxi. It's just that my work is in the central street and my children and I have to travel down to there [Matagalpa central]. As such I have to travel everyday with the two little ones...I have to pay for my children's passage. The daily passage is 10 Cordoba's, because I go, leave them, return, and go back to get them. Afterwards I have to go back to work until the early hours of the morning and then I return once more. (Interview Teresa, February 2006)

Furthermore the main thoroughfares in El Mirador are unpaved and have suffered extensive water damage making them difficult to pass in a vehicle (See figure 1.7). The isolation of the community has also meant that taxi drivers will not travel past a certain point as there have been numerous robberies in the area. While there are plans by the *alcaldía* to upgrade the roads this is a lengthy process and little besides a partial guttering system has been implemented to date (See figure 1.8).



Figure 1.7

Main road through El Mirador
(Rewa Tomlinson 2006)



Figure 1.8

Partial guttering in place in the entranceway to main road in El Mirador
(Rewa Tomlinson 2006)

Historical Legacy of Nicaragua

The impact of Hurricane Mitch was exacerbated by the underdevelopment of Nicaragua. Political and social revolutions of the past decades had left the country weakened and economically unstable. Political policies had failed to create substantial social and economic reforms; as a result the population remained indebted and in poverty. An awareness of the history of development in Nicaragua is essential to understanding the current political, social and economic approach to development. Accordingly this section gives insights into the history of Nicaragua prior to Hurricane Mitch and the place of gender within that history. Gender is an important variable in how development is practiced in Nicaragua, as the legacies of the revolutionary spirit are embedded in the way that gender is mobilised as collective action.

In 1821 Nicaragua gained independence from Spain, and two distinct political factions emerged: the liberals and the conservatives. These factions consistently fractured the stability of the country throughout its history (Black 1983). This political instability and Nicaragua's geographical location, in the isthmus of Central America,

also led to international intervention dominated by the United States. US military and economic controls crippled the country.

US interventionism in Nicaragua began with the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. The doctrine identified the Americas as an exclusive target for US military and commercial expansionism. Later social insurgencies in Nicaragua were reacting to US interventionism, and the Monroe Doctrine has endured as a justification for insurrection (Black 1983).

From 1857 until 1893 the Conservatives ruled Nicaragua; however, they failed to provide major structural reforms in the agrarian based economy and much of the peasant majority were kept in misery by repressive legislation (Black 1983; Dore 1997). This repression led to the first social uprising in Nicaragua. The uprising was led by the liberal José Santos Zelaya and paved the way for 16 years of development and modernization⁵. Zelaya bolstered the economy and entered into talks with foreign powers (The United Kingdom and Japan) in order to promote trade (Macaulay 1985). These talks, however, conflicted with US interests in the region (dollar diplomacy)⁶ and Zelaya was removed from office for infringing the Monroe Doctrine. The first US military intervention began after this point when 400 US Marines known as the “legation guard” were sent to Nicaragua (Black 1983; Calvert and Calvert 1993). A pattern of intervention would emerge time and time again in Nicaragua, negatively affecting economic and social progression and creating feelings of anti-imperialist nationalism amongst the people (Paige 1997).

The US Marine presence remained from 1912 until 1925, when it was replaced by the US trained and backed National Guard from 1926 until 1933 (Black 1983; Macaulay 1985; Paige 1997). Accordingly once again anti-imperialist nationalist sentiments emerged and a revolution began, led by General Augusto César Sandino and his army for the defence of national sovereignty. Much like the previous social uprising of Zelaya, Sandino started his revolution in reaction to US dollar diplomacy, which took key economic sectors out of Nicaraguan control and placed them in the hands of US bankers (Paige 1997). Sandino became popular as an activist for the lower classes, fighting for the redistribution of lands and creating social organisation amongst the peasantry.

During the revolution Anastasio Somoza García was appointed as the first Nicaraguan leader of the National Guard, where he became increasingly powerful. Somoza's National Guard killed Sandino after he had fled to the mountains, thus paving the way for Somoza to become the country's dictatorial leader (Black 1983; Macaulay 1985). Somoza redrafted the country's constitution providing a basis for a permanent dictatorship, and giving himself power over the state and military. His actions sank the country into military, cultural and ideological repression (Black 1983). The Somoza family ruled Nicaragua for over 40 years, accumulating vast amounts of personal wealth and fostering a strong friendship with the US, which continued to see Nicaragua as a cornerstone of successful political control in Latin America.

The totalitarian Somoza dictatorship began to crumble during the early 1970s. Regional economic development was in crisis and support began to emerge from the working classes for the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). The FSLN had been formed in 1961, in opposition to the dictatorship, by the intellectuals Carlos Fonseca, Tomás Borge, and Silvio Mayorga (Black 1983; Bugajski 1990). By targeting the working classes the FSLN slowly began to gather a significant following. In 1972 an earthquake tore apart the capital city Managua, and simultaneously fractured the Somoza dynasty, escalating support for the FSLN (Black 1983; Calvert and Calvert 1993). The bourgeoisie who had traditionally supported the dynasty also became discontented by the realisation that economic growth could not be sustained. The dissatisfaction of the masses provided a support base for the FSLN which allowed it to take all of the towns and cities ending with Managua on the 19 July 1979 (Black 1983; Bugajski 1990; Harris and Vilas 1985).

The oppression of the Somoza dynasty motivated the mobilisation of repressed citizens. One such group was the Association of Nicaraguan Women Confronting the Nation's Problems (AMPRONAC), that was organized to confront issues of particular concern to women, but also broader issues associated with the dictatorship (Randall 1981). The group became particularly active during the final years of the Somoza dictatorship, bringing together concerns women had about human rights. Ideologically, AMPRONAC focused on nationalising women and moving them beyond domestic, familial and community roles as a means of empowerment.

However, women found strength in these spheres and it was their identification as “self sacrificing defenders of their families” that initially helped women to mobilise against the dictatorship (Chinchilla 1990: 375; Randall 1981).

From 1979 the FSLN set out to improve the lives of Nicaraguans, through reconstruction, development and political democratisation (Harris and Vilas 1985). They were committed to a mixed economy, political pluralism, and a non-aligned foreign policy (see Jonas and Stein 1990; Wright 1990). The areas in which the FSLN enjoyed most success included education (see Black 1983; Ruchwarger 1985), health care (see Cupples 2002), and agrarian reform (see Biondi-Morra 1993; Baumeister 1985; Enríquez 1997). During this initial reconstruction period the FSLN also organised a number of mass organisations, including the women’s group Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMNLAE), as a means of supporting the development of participatory democracy (Cupples 2002; Wright 1990 and 1995). However, AMNLAE and the many other mass organisations were limited by their inability to effectively differentiate their priorities from party policies (see Wright 1995; Ruchwarger 1985). For AMNLAE and women in general this meant that autonomy over gender issues was subject to national interests which maintained traditional gender roles.

Shortly after the success of the FSLN in the revolution, Ronald Reagan came to power, and once more the US intervened in Nicaraguan affairs, by funding and equipping a counter-revolutionary force known as the Contras (Prado-Maurer 1990; Tirado 1985). The demands of the Contra War (1980-1990) meant that social welfare spending was diverted into defence funds. The result was that earlier gains during the 1979-1983 period in education, health and agrarian reform were undermined; economic conditions were worsened by a US trade embargo; and around 30,000 Nicaraguans were killed (Cupples 2002).

The FSLN’s distancing from the people, abuses of power, and inability to effectively improve living standards throughout the 1980s all contributed to the party’s electoral defeat in 1990 (Cupples 2002). The government of Violeta Chamorro (1990-1996), which was a US backed coalition, won the election and set about creating economic stabilisation. The Chamorro government made a commitment to opening up the

economy and improving fiscal outcomes. This contributed to the demise of previous social welfare reforms. Economic stabilisation and structural adjustment policies meant that for the majority of Nicaraguans, living standards failed to improve (Fernández Poncela and Steiger 1996; Kampwirth 1996). Under the FSLN, the economy had been nationalised; however, under Chamorro the economy began to be opened up through outward integration⁷.

The structural adjustment agenda throughout the 1990s saw a reversion to a market economy which raised the cost of living, increased unemployment and decreased real wages. Those who were most adversely affected by these policies were women, children and the poor (Babb 1996). Many academics have written about the impacts of structural adjustment on women in Nicaragua (examples include: Babb 1996; Fernández Poncela and Steiger 1996; Klein 1995) and all indicate that it is they who most often carry the daily burden generated by this policy. Women according to Babb (1996: 33) “seek new sources of income, stretch household budgets, and take up the slack by offering services that are no longer provided by the state.” Under neoliberal stabilisation women’s days are lengthened by the increasing demand on their time and energy both at home and at work.

From the 1990s onwards the reduced commitment to women has stimulated the growth of an autonomous women’s movement. Much of the movement has developed at grassroots level – through a variety of NGOs - and has developed a collective model of organisation that takes into account gender perspectives (Klein 1995). The growth in these bodies has occurred as a result of the inefficiencies in gender based public policy and has been fostered by the traditional revolutionary spirit of Nicaraguan women who have always been politically and socially active (Babb 1996; Klein 1995).

Then in October 1998 Hurricane Mitch hit Nicaragua. The country was largely unprepared for the category 5 storm, which struck hard and fast. The storm was severe and underdevelopment in the country only perpetuated its ferocity. The ability of the population to cope during and recuperate after the storm was tested as lives, homes and livelihoods were lost.

1998 and beyond

Since 1998 Nicaragua has continued to focus on development with an emphasis on meeting the targets outlined in the millennium development goals and the 2001 Strengthened Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (SGPRS) (World Bank 2003; IMF 2005). In fact in January 2004 Nicaragua achieved the relief of more than 80% of its debt under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC). Despite long periods of structural adjustment and fiscal discipline, Nicaragua has failed to see substantial changes in levels of poverty with (50% of the population below the poverty line), and considerable questions remain as to the effectiveness of social reforms (CIA 2006). Many people still live without adequate access to shelter (see table 1.3), water (see table 1.4), education (see table 1.5) and health services (see table 1.6). These high levels of poverty disproportionately affect the population with women and children the most vulnerable.

Table 1.3

Percentage of the Nicaragua population with insufficient access to housing (2001)

Group	Without Electricity	Inadequate Walls	Dirt Floor	Inadequate Ceiling	Inadequate Housing	Overcrowding (4 or more)
All Nicaragua	27.8	29.9	43.4	7.6	53.7	37.8
Extreme Poor	74.0	52.6	75.2	19.7	85.4	75.6
Not Extreme Poor	22.3	27.2	39.6	6.1	49.9	33.2
Poor	53.7	44.5	65.7	13.7	76.4	64.3
Non - Poor	12.9	21.54	30.6	4.1	40.6	22.5

(Adapted from World Bank 2003)

Table 1.4

Percentage of Nicaraguans without access to safe water (2001)

Group	Without Safe Water
All Nicaragua	15.8
Extreme Poor	36.6
Not Extreme Poor	13.3
Poor	26.3
Non-Poor	9.8

(Adapted from World Bank 2003)

Table 1.5

Educational Levels in Nicaragua – percentages and mean number of years (2001)

Group	Illiterate (10 or + years) %	% not attending ages 13-18	Mean years schooling total	Mean years schooling male	Mean years schooling female
All Nicaragua	18.7	37.2	4.9	4.5	5.3
Extreme Poor	41.3	62.2	2.6	2.4	2.9
Not Extreme Poor	15.2	32.2	5.4	5.0	5.7
Poor	29.4	49.9	3.6	3.3	3.9
Non – Poor	10.8	25.8	6.1	5.8	6.5

(Adapted from World Bank 2003)

Table 1.6

Indicators of Health and Nutrition services (2001)

Group	Received Prenatal Care	Incidence of Diarrhoea (under 6)	Consultation for Diarrhoea (under 6)	Distance Health (kms)	Distance Health (mins)
All Nicaragua	88.6	22.0	63.0	3.0	34.9
Extreme Poor	77.6	27.0	61.0	5.9	71.4
Not Extreme Poor	91.0	20.8	63.7	2.6	30.4
Poor	84.5	23.5	60.6	4.4	52.2
Non-Poor	93.2	20.1	67.0	2.1	24.8

(Adapted from World Bank 2003)

Thesis structure

In chapter two I consider the methodological implications of my research, and the way in which it is represented in the writing of this thesis. I also introduce my own reflections, emotions and understandings through commentary on my research experience. Chapter three focuses on the NGO presence in the community and how paternalistic tendencies have lead to increased vulnerability and aid dependence. Meanwhile chapter four discusses the level of cohesiveness in the community and the areas where cooperation and conflict counter exist. Chapter five brings together methodology and analysis, drawing out space for research scope and the implications of this research on development literature and practice.

¹ Nicaragua had previously experienced the effects of various hurricanes including Irene (1971), Joan (1988), Bert (1993) and Cesar (1996) but none of the magnitude of Mitch (Bradshaw 2002, NHRAIC 2005, Ranganath 2000)

² The seismic hazard in Nicaragua is created by the subduction of the Pacific Ocean floor under the western margin of Central and South America; Resulting in a chain of volcanoes along the continental plate (Ranganath 2000). To date two major earthquakes (1931 and 1972) have crippled the capital city, Managua with over 10,000 deaths and extensive damage to infrastructure, government, financial and business sectors (NHRAIC 2005).

³ Many children do not attend schools as their families are unable to provide clothes, shoes, pens, pencils, books and other basic requirements. In fact primary education is free in public primary schools, however due to high levels of crime targeted at schools; parents of students are forced to pay for a security guard and any damaged or stolen goods. Thus many families do not have the economic resources to keep children in the education system even despite the fact that it is free.

⁴ While I was in El Mirador the doors of a number of classrooms were stolen, and the community had to pool funds to replace them. They also had to employ a guard to watch over the school to ensure that damage and theft was not a common occurrence. All of these incidents increased the costs of education.

⁵ Zelayan Liberalism essentially created a return to nationalism and the fostering of the nation-state. This is particularly true of labour law during the Zelayan period, where a system of hierarchy was reinforced as a means of bolstering the state-building process (Wolfe 2004).

⁶ “Dollar Diplomacy” was a US policy for intervention in the Americas by substituting American Capital Investment for European. Also referred to as “Big Stick Diplomacy” after Roosevelt’s use of the African proverb “Speak softly and carry a big stick”. This policy came to a head in Nicaragua after the overthrow of Zelaya as economic and military intervention made Nicaragua a virtual American protectorate (Calvert and Calvert 1993: 20-21).

⁷ Outward integration as used by Dubcovsky (1999:172) describes the opening up of the Nicaraguan economy as a “process based on promoting exports, dismantling protectionism, opening trade, and reducing the state’s role in the economy. [This was coupled with the] simultaneous process of privatization of state corporations, lowering of tariffs, trade liberalization and private investment promotion...all within a structure of price, monetary and fiscal stability and inside a framework of regional integration.”

Chapter Two

Research Practice

“When we enter the field we make footprints on the land and are likely to disturb the environment. When we leave we may have mud on our shoes, pollen on our clothes. If we leave the gate open this may have serious implications for farmers and their animals. All of this is also relevant to what we find out about the field and its inhabitants.”
(Letherby 2003: 6)

Methods, Methodology and Epistemology

When we begin to think about the construction of a research project, we do so in terms of method, methodology and epistemology. This chapter discusses the use of a qualitative methodology in research, and outlines the appropriateness of this methodology in the context of the research documented in this thesis. I also describe the methods I employed, difficulties I encountered in the field, the implications of these methods, and general critiques of my approach to research. I place particular importance on writing myself into the research auto-biographically, and on considering how my own epistemological standpoints legitimate and validate particular knowledges. Consideration is also given to conducting research in Central America, through recognising and embracing difference. I also reflect on the inherent issues of power involved in research and more particularly those involved in cross cultural research.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methodology seeks to understand complex socio-spatial experiences through subjective understandings (Madge et al. 1997). In geography, qualitative research has been seen as an alternative to the traditional hegemonic quantitative approaches often used in information gathering and analysis. Rather than drawing on strict quantifiable data, qualitative research uses an in-depth approach to developing subjective knowledges, meanings, feelings and understandings from participants. As such qualitative methodology embraces the subjectivity, partiality, and reflexivity involved in the research process and is commonly practised when conducting feminist research.

Rather than testing a strict question or hypothesis, qualitative research often produces or develops questions throughout the process. This is because qualitative research is fluid and allows intersubjectivities to drive the direction and scope of the intended research. Thus qualitative research becomes more than just a method for data extraction, as positivist inspired research might be, since it also allows for a multiplicity of meanings to become apparent, an important process when researching social processes which are numerous and discursive. Qualitative research practices such as interviewing provide space for mutually constructed meanings and knowledges to emerge. The conscious choice to adopt qualitative research methods is according to Smith (2001: 23) "...a self-conscious political act", as a method it recognises conflicting social realities and gives voices to those previously silenced by the hegemonic discourse (Smith 2001). For the purpose of this research qualitative methods validate the study of gender and community, and position both of these study areas as discursive and evolving from constantly changing social realities. Personally, qualitative research provides for me a more holistic approach to understanding society and its complex social conditions. This is because society is not a homogenised entity to be quantified, but rather a constantly evolving dialogue.

Putting words into practice

While there are various qualitative research methods the most commonly practised are interviews. Interviews allow for detailed explanations in the voices of participants with the intention of being open, cooperative, and complex. I chose to use in-depth semi-structured interviewing to explore the complex social realities of participants in this context. Interviews are a means of mediating intersubjective realities formulated through combined interaction of the participant and the researcher. Together a story is constructed and recorded fulfilling the aims of a piece of research and hopefully providing insight into the lives of participants. For me interviewing provided an efficient and interactive way of conversing with participants. In total I conducted 13 interviews ranging between 40 minutes and an hour. Eleven of the interviews were with community members and 2 of the interviews were with employees of the Communal Movement, who had had significant interaction with community members, and involvement in the El Mirador project since its inception.

The practical research process began in New Zealand with the initial information gathering and design of an interview schedule. The interview schedule was a list of various topics and questions which could be used during the interview process (see Appendix A). This schedule was further developed in the first two weeks of my field research as I analysed various documents and information on the community held by the Communal Movement. I also viewed many of the letters sent in by community members in application for a place in the community¹. All of this information went into finalising an appropriately informed relevant interview schedule. As Dunn (2000:54) indicates all researchers can "...benefit from some written reminder of the intended scope of the interview". The interview schedule was used as a backup to bridge communication gaps and to supply me with confidence. It also acted as a guide to make sure that I covered the basic thematic areas required in the interview. This was particularly important as all of the interviews were conducted in the participant's native language Spanish, and although I have a good grasp of conversational Spanish there are occasions when my accent or unfamiliarity with vocabulary can make interviewing difficult. Having an interview schedule also allowed me to focus on being an active listener, and to directly engage in the conversation, rather than being occupied by thoughts of having to think up new topic areas or questions.

The next step was formally introducing myself to the community and its members. This was done through a series of visits to El Mirador, and visits to key community members, identified by the Communal Movement, who could act as guides for my time in the community. I also used this time to begin negotiating research deals, trying to establish appointments or dates and times when participants would be available for interviews. I originally chose this method so as to interfere as little as possible on the lives of participants. While in theory this approach is the most sympathetic to the needs of the participants, in reality it proved difficult to accomplish in this setting. I initially received a positive reception and response in the community to the work I was doing, and organised a variety of interview dates with participants. However, on several occasions when I returned to the community to conduct the interviews, I found that participants were unavailable or not home. There is no simple or straightforward answer as to why I had so many difficulties in setting up interviews, as each participant had their own reasons.

Eventually after trying several times to negotiate mutually agreeable times and days, I decided just to go to the community and walk around and see who was available to be interviewed. In retrospect this technique proved more sympathetic in this setting, rather than trying to pin people down to a time and day, in a culture where time is an extremely valuable commodity (inelasticity of time²). Using this technique I found that I spoke with a broader variety of participants than anticipated, and people seemed more willing and interested in the interview process. For me the adaptation of this technique meant compromising on various points of the interview, including conducting the interviews while others were present, interviewing while people were completing domestic chores, and interviewing in settings which were noisy or distracting to both myself and participants. In many cases these compromises were unavoidable, but in my mind they typify the cultural practices present in this community, and seemed to enhance rather than harm the overall interview process.

Generally interviews were conducted in the homes of participants, seated in their living areas. They were face-to-face and typically lasted about an hour although not all of this time was used in interviewing some was used in disseminating relevant information and obtaining consent. Recording of the interviews did not begin until this process was complete. I chose to deliver information regarding the project orally due to the illiteracy or limited literacy levels of some participants. Many of these ethical considerations had been made in New Zealand prior to arrival in Nicaragua as projects conducted through the University of Canterbury involving human participants require the approval of the Human Ethics Committee. Some concern was raised by the Human Ethics Committee about the absence of information sheets and consent forms detailing the intentions of this research. However it was agreed that particular attention would be paid to explaining the aims and intentions of the research orally to all participants. It was important for me not to present information in written form as it was culturally inappropriate in this setting and biased towards participants with certain levels of education. It does raise an important issue however, which is, to what extent can standard ethical practices as outlined by Human Ethics Committees be practised in the field? This is a particularly pertinent question for New Zealand universities as many begin to develop substantive development studies programmes. These ethical dilemmas are further considered in Chapter Five.

All of the interviews were recorded on a dictaphone for the purpose of analysis and transcribing. Very few field notes were taken during the interview process as I needed to be attentive to the participants in order to effectively contribute to conversation and to devise further secondary prompting questions on various points. Due to the nature of the interview sites and situations various recordings have other people's voices or unwanted background noises, and in some cases even secondary conversations. Although these interruptions on the recording are not ideal they are a reality of conducting research in this setting. Some examples of the interview situations and sites are detailed in Figure 2.1 and 2.2.

Figure 2.1
Interview with Marcella

The interview with Marcella took place in the Guanuca markets, her place of work. The Guanuca Markets are one of the largest markets in central Matagalpa. Marcella worked at a stall selling women's clothing. Marcella was the only participant I interviewed in their place of work. Like any Central American market place it was a busy area with people mingling and shopping, street sellers calling out, and buses and taxis constantly transiting. As Marcella looked after the store solely we had to conduct the interview at her stall. There was no place to sit so we stood during the interview. There were various background noises, and constant interruptions as people came to look at the stall and buy clothes. Also my presence at the stall caused considerable curiosity. Firstly from those shoppers who saw the presence of a white woman at this stall as an indication that these clothes must be fashionable and that the person selling them of some importance. And secondly from the children employed in the markets to sell vegetables and other goods on the street. They were fascinated by me and spent almost the entire duration of the interview touching my hair and my skin, asking questions about why I was there and observing the interview. Undeniably it is difficult as a researcher to interview under these circumstances. But also a unique opportunity to observe and interact with people in a more realistic setting. I have chosen this interview as an illustration as I feel it is representative of the complexities involved in interviewing, and the need for a researcher to be flexible open and adaptable throughout the interview process.

Figure 2.2
Interview with María

The interview with María took place in her home and was the final interview I conducted in the community. For all of my visits to the community I was accompanied by an employee of the communal movement of Matagalpa. These people acted as guides, helped me to break down barriers and provided safety. By accompanying me in the field these people became gatekeepers both to the people who would be participants and the type of information some participants shared. This was particularly true of the interview with María. María played an important role in the community and in the past few years had emerged as a leader. She had become an important contact person for the Communal Movement and had looked after me and spent hours telling me about the community. On the day of her interview another participant Alejandro was present at her home. I had interviewed Alejandro first and then proceeded to interview María, however due to the size of her home and lack of seating Alejandro and my contact person from the Communal Movement remained seated in the room having a secondary conversation. While this conversation has implications in the interview process such as clarity of recording, perhaps the most important implication was that María became hesitant and less candid in her opinions. She often looked over after answering questions to gauge the reaction of the Communal Movement employee. Her tone of voice and pitch improved when she was complementing or remarking on the efforts of the Communal Movement. This was further complicated when the Communal Movement employee prompted María to divulge information that she thought I would want to hear, thus becoming directly involved in the interview. It is important in my mind to write about the dynamics of this interview as it highlights the subjectivity apparent in the interview process, and how the presence of observers can influence the interview.

Participants were found using the snowballing technique and through leads offered by my guides in the community (Communal Movement employees). The difficulty of having a guide is that they can end up becoming gate keepers, mediating access and information. Moreover recent debates surrounding knowledge creation suggest that through the interview process we create, confirm and disconfirm meanings and interpretations (McDowell 1996). As such it is imperative that recognition is given not only to the intersubjectivities between researcher and research subject, but also of others involved in the research process. By acknowledging the presence of others in the field I hope that the complex subjectivities involved in interviewing are made apparent.

Another element of field research was observation and the use of ethnographic techniques. While I did not live directly in the community I studied, I did live with a local Nicaraguan family. Undeniably my experiences and observations of this family

help to construct my understanding of life in Nicaragua. Perhaps more importantly these experiences have given my research depth, as discourse/power are discursive practices located in and mediated by society; thus allowing myself as a researcher, a greater appreciation and understanding of social institutions and practices in this setting (Kearns 2000). This is because both language, and relationships are constructed by society and are not fixed in one specific time and place, instead they are partial and digress from subject to subject. Throughout my analysis and write up I indicate and consider the relevance of some of the ethnographic observations I made during my 6 week research visit. Where appropriate I have tried to indicate the context of life in Nicaragua and how this may have influenced the words of participants.

Write up and Analysis

On my return from the field I began the analysis and writing processes. Firstly I reviewed my interview recordings several times noting significant subject areas recognised by participants. Rather than transcribing the entire interview transcript I chose to record cue numbers for each cassette denoting points of significance within the interview. I then extracted direct quotes off the interview cassette in Spanish and transcribed them into English. I also made a note of the context of conversation that the quote was extracted from. With this information I then began to develop a system of coding wherein opinions were organised by both subject and stance. I used positive coding to represent quotes and opinions that related to the identified research themes; and negative coding to identify where there were gaps in information, or critiques of my interaction as a researcher (Davidson and Tolich 1999). This information formed the basis for developing thematic chapters in the writing of this thesis. In Chapter Three I consider the position of the Communal Movement, as this organisation has a visible impact on the lives of all participants, and has largely been responsible for the direction of community development in the past 7 years. Then in Chapter Four I shift the focus back to the community looking at the relationships that have formed. This theme emerged as participants consistently recognised areas where there was tension in the community which hindered continued development.

Grounded theory has also played a part in the writing process. Grounded theory argues for an inductive approach to research, whereby an hypothesis and theoretical

ideas are developed from the observations made about the data generated (Glaser and Strauss 1968; Marshall 1998). Thus during the writing process I used my findings to dictate structure and style. Accordingly the way that I have structured this thesis is representative of the information I gathered during the interview process, and differs markedly from the ideas I had before embarking on field research. It is hoped that the structure of this thesis is indicative of the fluid nature of qualitative research and my willingness to represent participants in a way that acknowledges the intersubjective nature of the construction of knowledge. Stylistically writing in the first person denotes how my own subjectivities have impacted on the writing and analysis process.

Representation

One of the most important considerations when writing up research is representation. How we choose to represent ourselves, our participants, and our research not only reveals our own subjectivities, but also how we wish others to interpret our work. As Hoggart et al., (2002:2) suggest “representation is not transparent; it inevitably influences, inflects, [and] distorts the thing it represents.” Accordingly I have chosen to detail some of the ethical decisions and dilemmas I encountered when considering representation.

Debate on representation has largely centred on the self, insisting that research must include an auto-biographical account of the researcher's objectives and values. Thus when research is read by others it can be done so with an understanding of the stance and bias of the author. While I have followed this approach and placed an emphasis on writing myself into the research, I do so cautiously, aware of debates surrounding the extent to which a person can be introspective (See Cupples 2002, Rose 1997 and my earlier comments on transparent reflexivity). Moreover I am acutely aware of the assumptions that surround the use of words such as white, western, feminist and woman. As such, throughout this research I have provided commentary detailing situational and emotional sentiments in the hope that my positionality as a researcher is as obvious as it can be.

Much like the representation of ones self, issues surrounding the representation of participants are also hotly debated in academic literature (see Letherby 2003 for

debate on the title of participants; Madge et al. 1997; Cupples and Kindon 2003). Within the body of the text I have tried to use comments and quotes from all of my participants however due to the limited time and scope available in this project I have often used singular quotes which are representative of the opinions held by various people. To allow the reader to understand who my participants are I have also provided participant profiles, detailing relevant information that I ascertained during the interview process. I have attempted to make these profiles unique to each individual, providing both generalizable and personal information.

Power and Difference – Research in Central America

My field research in Nicaragua was my second experience as a researcher in Central America, and follows on from a postgraduate research project conducted in Costa Rica. Central America provides a unique research setting. As a young female researcher I had to adapt to being yelled at, approached, and even touched in the streets by strange men. I had to learn to shower with buckets of cold water, to eat rice and beans up to three times a day, and to become a part of a very different culture. At the same time I became more thick skinned, acting and behaving in ways which I may not normally do. I often find that I am more outgoing and independent in this environment than I am back at home in New Zealand. For me this type of experience was unique as I partially got to walk in the shoes of someone else for a short period of time; getting a glimpse of what it is like to be a Nicaraguan. However within this research setting I also become acutely aware of my own difference my whiteness, my foreignness, my sexuality, my power, and my wealth; and how this difference is perceived by others (Sundberg 2003). Embracing and realising that this difference exists and creates power dynamics which are unavoidable has been an important part in developing my research.

Relationships based on unequal power are unavoidable in research but are not always clear cut. By researching cross culturally, power dynamics are evident in that as a white educated female I hold an element of power over the participants; I control the information I receive and the interpretation of this information. Yet power dynamics are far from one-sided, from my perspective I hold a precarious position in the field due to my age (22 years), many of my participants often viewed me as a child, someone who has not really lived life, thus my understanding of issues was often

compared to the experiences/understandings of participant's children. Moreover as many feminist researchers have indicated; as women in the field we create and become part of various power dynamics (Valentine 2002). During my research in Nicaragua one of the most obvious indications that gendered power dynamics were existent came in my sole interview with a man. I found that I avoided topics on parenthood, sexual health and the like, which had been important in interviews with women. Rather I focused on employment, community leadership, and community issues in my discussions with this man. Thus, I tailored my interview to revolve around the kinds of issues that I saw affected men in this community and those issues which I felt comfortable discussing with an older man. Undeniably my interview involved various levels of power dynamics and paralleled some of the issues of power inherent in the community.

Conclusion

This analysis of methodology is by no means complete and should be viewed as a guide to the methodology used in my research rather than an exact account. While I hope that I have reached a level of introspection which provides insight into my own perspectives in conducting research, I am very much aware that complete introspection is difficult if not impossible. I have combined interviews and ethnographic techniques to generate information from my participants. Another important part of my methodology is the consideration given to difficulties and differences I encountered in the field. This is because I recognise that any research knowledge is created and sustained through social relations and interactions, and that it is an interactive and discursive process. This also gives rise to questions of representation and power in fieldwork and research. Undoubtedly power in research is a very contentious issue and one of the hardest points of research to analyse. While I hope to have acknowledged that power dynamics played an important role in this research. I also realise the extent to which I can recognise and acknowledge power is highly debatable. Primarily because power is neither fixed nor stagnant rather it is an ever shifting interaction between sameness and difference, and where as a researcher I occupy multiple positions and spaces.

¹ Letters were not used as a primary source of information for the completion of this research. This choice was made as this was private information I was privileged to and not generally available. Also I had no express permission by the authors to use information contained in those letters. As such an ethical decision was made that that information would serve only as informative background research.

² The concept of the inelasticity of time is particularly relevant in the lives of women. It refers to times when the burden placed on the daily lives of people increases, but the hours available in a day do not. Thus although the burden is elastic and stretches, time is not (therefore it is inelastic). Accordingly people's days become longer and they have less time to spend in leisure activities or with family or friends.

Chapter Three

NGO involvement: The culture of dependency in El Mirador

Introduction

NGOs are often the first organisations on hand post disaster; leading the disaster responses and development planning. They work on the ground, close to the local people providing relief and development assistance. However, often they become so consumed by disaster relief efforts that they lose sight of long term development goals. This chapter details the role of the NGO, the Communal Movement in the development of El Mirador post Hurricane Mitch. Specifically it looks at how paternalistic tendencies have left a legacy of aid dependence and vulnerability in the community. This sense of dependence is also added to by the project culture inherent in development practice in Nicaragua more generally. Consideration is also given to the way in which grouping of disaster victims can lead to an increased sense of victimisation and dislocation from the rest of society. The specific approach to target gender by NGOs is also considered as they encourage two conflicting standpoints, one of sacrifice, and one of empowerment.

Disaster relief and development – How and why do they lead to dependency?

According to Anderson and Woodrow (1989) disaster relief initiatives have generally not contributed to long term development, in fact on some levels they have actually undermined or subverted development. This is because in times of emergency, development goals are often lost or deferred as NGOs struggle to maintain their commitment to development, while an immediate disaster response is needed. Throughout emergency phases, NGOs halt their everyday development activities to focus on meeting the immediate needs of victims (Raganath 2000). Speed of delivery becomes essential, meaning that there is little time for consideration of development implications. The result is that relief efforts can become limited focusing solely on immediate needs and suffering. This process means that existing local capacities for development can be undermined. According to Anderson and Woodrow (1989:49):

[w]e see women sitting in lines waiting for food, yet we know that in most societies women are the managers of food systems, including its preparation and allocation.

Thus women who traditionally are in charge of food systems can become subverted by relief efforts, which although logistically efficient, fail to consider development impacts and existing capacities. Their capacity to allocate food resources is removed from them and instead conducted by people allocated by an aid agency. Such an approach fails to recognise an already existing capacity which works in a specific socio-cultural context. Much the same is true of situations where too much aid is given; local resources can become overwhelmed and people can begin to develop unrealistic expectations. Often people will redefine their needs at levels only supported by outside aid, thus increasing levels of dependency on outside agencies for advice, leadership and resources (Anderson and Woodrow 1989). This in turn results in increasing vulnerabilities or a change in vulnerabilities for the affected population, thus meaning that aid can in fact be extremely detrimental if not delivered appropriately post disaster.

The Communal Movement

The organisation which works closely with the community at El Mirador is the Communal Movement of Matagalpa. The Communal Movement, nationally, is an autonomous neighbourhood lobbying organisation which began as the Committee for Sandinista Defence (CDS), after the Revolution and the success of the FSLN (see Chapter One). Essentially it is a leftist pro-poor organisation which works closely with various communities and neighbourhoods to ensure access to basic goods and services, and it also provides a voice in local government politics. Nationally the Communal Movement is structured hierarchically, with the Matagalpan branch at the municipal level (see Figure 3.1). The *consejo popular* is the local, neighbourhood based committees. These feed into the *consejo municipal* which is the level where the Communal Movement of Matagalpa is located with its leaders and contributing members. The hierarchy then follows to the *consejo inter-municipal* which is a combination of various municipally based branches. At this level there are 15 different *consejo inter-municipales*. The *asamblea nacional* is the level which amalgamates all of the lower levels grouping together various Communal Movement leaders. The *consejo nacional* consists of a small group which designate the direction

of the Communal Movement nationally. This is overseen by the *equipo coordinador*, who administer the Communal Movement.

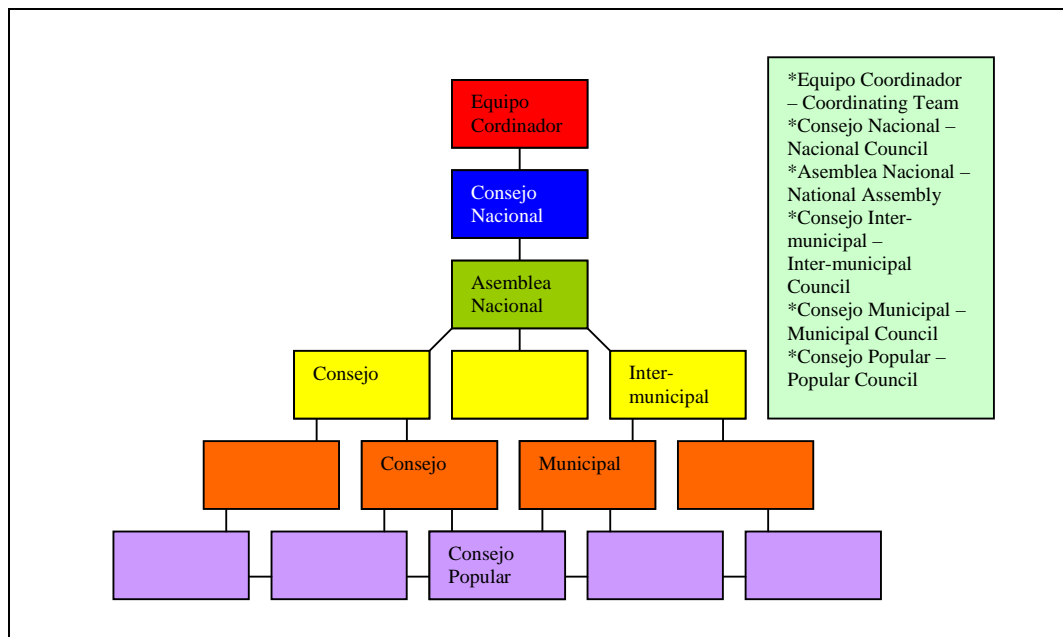


Figure 3.1

Representative structure of the Communal Movement of Nicaragua

(Interview Janet, February 2006)

(Rewa Tomlinson 2006)

Janet a Communal Movement member explains how the Communal Movement became involved with the community:

That project was begun as a result of Hurricane Mitch we worked with various neighbourhoods and communities of Matagalpa; for example the neighbourhoods 28 de Augusto, Guanuca and 5 de Mayo, all of which had suffered extensive damage as a result of the hurricane. In this project we worked with a Swiss group called *Centro internacional de los palmes* and also with the city council of El Sabadell. Fifty houses were constructed with each group. We approached the municipal authorities requesting terrain to build the houses, and they allocated us that land at El Mirador. That is when the process of convincing families to move from Central Matagalpa to El Mirador began. It was a long process. At first we built the *champas* to house the residents, as they needed to be close to the area so that they could work. Residents lived in *champas* for the best part of 6 months while they constructed the houses.

We also constructed a *casa communal* and a *comedor infantil*. I was the coordinator in leading this project.
(Interview Janet, February 2006)

In the case of El Mirador finding projects which met the immediate needs of residents such as shelter, food, water and electricity took precedence post Hurricane Mitch. The Communal Movement and other organisations involved in the community prioritised the physical projects rather than focusing on increasing levels of social mobilisation and community cohesion. All of the projects prioritised the individual, and focused on meeting the immediate needs of specific families. Communally beneficial projects were largely absent, apart from the communal kitchen and the later school development. The community developed dependence, not only on agency funding, but also on aid workers. In particular the Communal Movement had close involvement with almost every infrastructural addition to the community. Often acting as a facilitator between the community and outside agencies as was suggested by María:

Yes, the Communal Movement has helped a lot here. Firstly with the houses, then with the school, as there used to be no school here, all of the classes were in a small room commissioned by the Communal Movement...yes, there in the communal kitchen they had classes, and two other small classrooms. Then also through the Communal Movement and El Sabadell, they sent us a transformer for the lights, and then they put in the public water pumps, and now they are helping us to obtain water inside our homes. They always help us. (Interview María, February 2006)

The role of the Communal Movement in the community of El Mirador is one of leadership. It delegates projects and responsibility in an attempt to ensure the continued development of the community. However, arguably a 'culture of projects' has emerged as dependency on outside organisations has grown. One clear example of this is through the various water projects implemented in the community. The reliance of the community on outside agencies to fund water based projects has weakened their own cohesiveness and initiative, to the point that some residents will actually exploit others over access to water. Initially the community had no direct access to water. Instead it was gathered at the nearest river a 40 minute walk away, or it was delivered and sold on trucks, which was both costly and unreliable. Accordingly the

Communal Movement recognised the need to implement a water system in the community. Then, with funding from El Sabadell, they laid piping to connect the community to a water tower and put pumps in place at strategic locations throughout the community. Many of the residents participated in this project as it was promoted and required by the Communal Movement. The stipulation of requirement comes from the Communal Movement who actively works to ensure all residents take part in the various projects. Generally contracts are drawn up and signed by all residents prior to commencement as to the minimum standard of participation required in the project. Once decided upon it is policed strictly by individual community members and leaders of the Communal Movement. Those who can not participate due to other commitments, such as employment must replace their labour with a monetary contribution which is used to find paid labour, or else they must personally find someone to replace them. Otherwise they do not benefit from the project. However conflict has arisen between original residents of the community and new residents, because some of the original residents feel that since the new residents did not contribute to communal projects (originally) they should not benefit them; for example projects related to water and electricity. This has lead to some residents exploiting others over access to water as Teresa (a new resident) explains.

...I have a pump in front of my house, but there are people in this community who say that the water is their water. And I say that it is my water as well, but if I had a tube into my home I would not have this problem. (Interview Teresa, February 2006)

As Anderson and Woodrow (1989) suggest internal fighting and conflict which can not be resolved by the community is a sign of dependency. As a result the Communal Movement have stepped in once more, encouraging and aiding the community to form a campaign to get the *alcaldia* to lay piping which will connect the water tanks directly to homes. This campaign was successful, and while I was there the *alcaldia* was finishing laying piping with the intention of having the new water system up and running by September 2006. While arguably this solves the problem of exploitation by allowing individual access, it does not address the root cause of the issue which is social mistrust. The dynamics of these conflicts within the community are explored in more depth in Chapter Four. Thus in some ways a culture of projects may resolve

issues and encourage community development in the short term, while failing to provide sustainable long term development initiatives which deal with the underlying causes of tension in this community. It also has the effect of overwhelming community members with aid, making them incapable of achieving any sort of successful community development on their own terms, and overwhelming their own local resources and capacities. This is because both individuals and communities possess various resources and capacities, too much aid can cause existing resources and capacities to become subsumed by the resources and capacities and aid agencies. The result is that communities redefine their levels of need and capacity based on unrealistic measurements, which are unsustainable in the long term once aid money and agencies are removed from the community. The community has formed a reliance on the Communal Movement to aid in projects and to develop ideas to enhance the community. While the Communal Movement has no issue with this role, it does recognise the severe lack of self reliance in the community as being very limiting. This lack of self reliance means that once projects are initiated they require constant supervision and involvement by the Communal Movement to develop successfully. For the Communal Movement the amount of resources required to administer a project are increased as the capacity of residents is decreased as a result of a lack of self sufficiency. This is because the Communal Movement has to administer things that could have been done by the community had they not been so reliant on the help of an outside agent.

Well there have passed various processes. One process which we aimed to encourage along with various other organisations and the community was appropriate strategies for community development...throughout these past 7 years we [the Communal Movement] have worked predominantly with the community ensuring its success. However, now the *alcaldia* has a greater presence in the community. So the community have begun to work more closely with the *alcaldia*. The difficulty is that the community is rather disorganised, as such it often struggles to work well with the *alcaldia*. We still however, have a strong presence in the community and have many vehicles with which to ensure the smooth implementation of projects. (Interview Janet, February 2006)

The result is that community identity is still very much linked with the identity of the Communal Movement. Residents consistently acknowledge that they are part of the Communal Movement project and speak about how the Communal Movement aids them in almost every endeavour. This limited ability to become self sustaining means that vulnerabilities for the community and individuals may become more entrenched; undermining development initiatives already in place. Thus, while consideration is given to trade offs in vulnerability as a result of development initiatives; often the capacity of residents to mitigate negative vulnerabilities is overestimated.

Leadership and participation

In El Mirador the Communal Movement stands out as an organisation which provides strong leadership in the community. Its long standing position and its understanding of the circumstances of citizen's places it ideally into a leadership role. Undeniably the directions it takes in leadership are tied to its social and political commitments as an organisation. These are pro-poor initiatives which attempt to create development from the ground up, with a specific focus on mobilising citizens against injustices in basic human rights. The Communal Movement also takes an active role in delegating and co-ordinating leadership positions in the community of El Mirador. It offers leadership training and a forum for discussing issues related to community leadership on a fortnightly basis. While in Nicaragua I attend a leadership meeting where various community leaders from all over Matagalpa reviewed the effectiveness of their individual community development, discussed leadership initiatives and participation levels, and proposed future plans for action in their communities (Reunion consejo municipal del MCN Matagalpa 21/01/06). Leaders discussed concerns associated with the lack of participation in many of the communities, and the persistent reliance on only a few key members to actually participate. The common theme which emerged was that the majority of residents relied on the commitment of a small minority to take action.

Undeniably as a leader the Communal Movement takes on an extremely paternalistic role, both with community members and through the way that it directs development. Mirian explained how a Communal Movement leader Auxiliadora had given her a recommendation for a job, after she had spoken with her about her inability to find employment (Interview Mirian, February 2006). I experienced the Paternalistic nature

of the Communal Movement first hand in El Mirador during one of my interviews. I had been accompanied by one of the communal movement leaders to one of my participants homes there we began the interview with a tour round the home and garden. While in the garden the Communal Movement leader whom I was with noticed that the family had been defecating in the patio rather than the latrine. The participant was instructed by the Communal Movement member that such practices were inappropriate and unsanitary, and that on return to community to the community it was expected that this sort of practice no longer happened. During the interview I asked the participant why they did not use the latrine, and she proceeded to explain that since her home was located at the bottom of the settlement water often ran off from the other homes, flooding the latrine leaving a mess and damaging her garden and some of her crops. The solution to this problem for her and her family was to defecate outside and then bury the deposits. My participant made clear to me that from now on she would encourage her family to use the latrines, because the Communal Movement leader knew what was best. In my mind this highlights the nature of the 'we know what is best so follow our instructions', relationship between the Communal Movement and residents at El Mirador, which is extremely paternalistic.

Paternalistic tendencies are also shown in how the Communal Movement filters all development initiatives. Even those projects organised by other agencies (such as the water piping project by the *alcaldia*) have had input from the Communal Movement. Once again this approach to development practice leads to dependency and an undermining of the community's own capacity for organisation.

Creating leaders and participation

The Communal Movement has played a primary role in developing the leadership structure, and ways in which residents may participate towards community development. The approach resembles many of their other initiatives in the community in that the majority of positions are controlled by the Communal Movement, often to the point that Communal Movement leaders will allocate who will hold the positions, ensuring that community leaders share the same goals and objectives as the Communal Movement. In terms of residents leadership there are varying members and positions in the community. There is the *Directiva* of which

Maria and Gabriela are a part. This group provides a liaising point with the *alcaldia* and outside agencies such as the Communal Movement. Also there are the *brigadistas* who are leaders in healthcare issues and in general have developed a strong following, in a variety of areas including instigating debate around the possibility of opening a *centro de salud* (health clinic) in the community. Gabriela is also an educational leader in the community. Her role as a teacher in the local school, and her volunteer work through adult literacy programmes means that many residents feel confident consulting with her on issues in the community, as she is recognised as an effective leader who will get the job done. Most of the criticisms of leadership were that the leaders seldom changed, meaning that predominantly the opinions and ideas of a small minority were the ones which carried the most weight. A particular sticking point with some residents was that the idea of having a community run childcare centre had been vetoed at the last minute by a leader who disagreed that it was a priority. Since that point the idea had resurfaced at various community meetings but always with the same result.

Participation in the community was difficult to gauge at the time I was there as there were no active projects besides the water piping project which was nearing completion. However many of the residents spoke about the ways they had participated in the building of homes and how they still enjoyed being part of the community projects, despite them often being time consuming (Most residents have to fit community projects into an already busy schedule – see Chapter Two, time inelasticity). For most, the reward outweighed the time concerns. Isabella made an interesting comment suggesting that there was a culture of participation present in the community:

There is lots of cooperation in projects here whatever the cause. I guess because it is difficult for people to say no, as we have all contributed for so long (Interview Isabella, February 2006).

This comment may also be in reference to community members not wanting to let down or disappoint the Communal Movement, who have an expectation that certain community members will cooperate. A sort of ‘don’t bite the hand that feeds you’ mentality. However by contrast all of the newer residents said they did not take an

active part in any of the community projects, though they more often than not benefited from them. They primarily cited a lack of interest and the feeling of being separate and outside of the community as the main reasons for not taking an active role in projects (Interview Teresa and Paola, February 2006). In conversation with Alejandro we spoke of the role that men had in participating in projects, he said those that were unemployed actively participated alongside the woman, while those with employment simply paid for the services of another to replace them. He described the practice as a kind of custom in the community either you helped directly or you found someone else to take your place. Arguably much of the participation structure (the amount of hours and the types of work undertaken) reflected that initially instigated by the Communal Movement post Mitch, and was consistently supported and encouraged by Communal Movement members (see Cupples 2002 for discussion on the gendering of project work post hurricane Mitch).

Dislocation and relocation

One of the major changes in the lives of all residents in El Mirador post disaster has been the dislocation from familiar social networks and relocation to the new community. As Bolin (1994) indicates the ability for individuals to cope and recover from such changes depends on a variety of mitigating factors including social, cultural, ecological, historical, political and economic forces. Dislocation and relocation often disrupt social networks as people are removed from familiar community and neighbourhood settings and placed into strange unfamiliar environments.

Damnificados forever?

Raphael (1986) considers the syndrome of disaster amongst survivors and suggests that in refuges and camps post disaster there is often a syndrome of ongoing despair as survivors are constantly surrounded and confronted by the consequences of disaster. Consistently after a disaster victims are often placed in a state of dislocation, removed from familial and community ties, and placed into a realm of physical and emotional upheaval. Raphael (1986) suggests that the grouping of these disaster victims may in fact heighten these emotions and leave people in a state of constant desperation. The question which remains is, can the same sentiments be seen in a community built and designed exclusively to house the residents of a disaster? Do the

community and its members create a disaster syndrome? Arguably some elements of this syndrome still exist; participants consistently refer to themselves as *damnificados* of Hurricane Mitch. Moreover they live in a community which is a constant reminder of the disaster. Signs at the entrance to the community describe how it was constructed for *damnificados* of Hurricane Mitch. Their neighbours are by and large also *damnificados*. Despite over seven years passing, the feelings of disaster still resonate strongly in this community. Perhaps on some levels this constant feeling of being disaster victims plays a part in the ways in which social capital comes to be mobilised. To some extent social capital can be strengthened as residents are inspired by their shared experience of disaster. As Delaney and Schrader (2000) noted high levels of social capital were present in Nicaragua immediately after the hurricane, these levels were subsequently subverted as people became disillusioned with the national agenda for recovery and transformation. However on the other hand as Raphael (1986: 131) suggests the grouping of disaster victims can stabilise disorganisation and hold “people as if frozen in time in a moment of extreme dislocation”, thus reinforcing feelings of vulnerability and loneliness, and increasing the likelihood of dependency. While there is a limited amount of literature available on the outcomes of grouping victims particularly in the long term, it is not surprising that such an approach has the potential to affect social capital both positively and negatively. Social Capital is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

The role of NGOs in targeting gender

NGOs in Nicaragua have also made an attempt to incorporate gender into their disaster relief and development initiatives. This is because they recognise that disaster and development both affect women and men in different ways and as such each must be considered with equal importance thus the specificity of gender needs to be considered (Enarson and Morrow 1998; Peacock and Ragsdale 1997). Gender implications are implicit and must be considered especially as women have specific and important capacities in the reconstruction process (Anderson and Woodrow 1989). Women have played an important part in organisation and mobilisation in Nicaragua. They have developed a combined social voice to put forward concerns specifically related to women and children. This has been particularly prevalent as structural adjustment policies and neoliberal reforms further increase the feminization of poverty (Babb 1996, Fernandez Poncela and Steiger 1996, Montoya 2003).

After Mitch many women shouldered the triple burden of productive work, reproductive work and community organising (Delaney and Schrader 2000); leading to increases in working days and added stress and pressure on women and their families. Many NGO's and social organisations working in Nicaragua have used these networks of women to foster community growth and development, while aiming to address apparent gender inequality (see for example how the women's collectives in El Hatillo effectively worked in conjunction with the Communal Movement – Chapter Four). The women's movement in Nicaragua developed primarily out of the period of Sandinista rule, post revolution, as a result of freedoms previously denied during the 40 year Somoza dictatorship increased (see Chapter One for discussion on AMPRONAC and AMNLAE).

Women's groups then exploded in the 1990s as neo-liberal structural adjustment policies burdened many women with increased economic hardship, and less support for necessary social services. More recently a more autonomous women's movement has emerged as collectives of women differentiate themselves from AMNLAE (the primary body of the women's movement), which is still seen to have strong ties with the Sandinista political party (Babb 1996). The result is that NGOs have found a space to align themselves to these autonomous movements to support and encourage growth. In particular women's collectives on a community based level have become a popular alternative (Klein 1995). They provide essential services to the community that come from the community. Thus services are provided on a grassroots level, designed to encompass the particularities of different communities and different women. Predominantly there has been an emphasis on issues surrounding health, legal aid, and physical and sexual violence, as these are pertinent to women in most communities (Klein 1995). Consistently women's groups have provided an outlet for combining resources and capacities of individuals together, and putting them to effective use alongside NGO's.

In El Mirador specific programmes targeting women have been implemented around health care, with a number of *brigadistas* active in the community and encouraging programmes based on improving women's healthcare (see Chapter Four). Also there has consistently been a focus on ensuring that there are suitable employment

opportunities for women, and that they have the necessary skills to locate employment. However Teresa discussed the difficulty in finding employment which she saw as basically coming down to luck and the willingness to do jobs or work hours that others do not want to:

In this time it is difficult, very difficult to find employment but sometimes one finds employment by luck. I only work as a waitress and it is difficult, very difficult. Sometimes I have to work from six in the afternoon until two in the morning, and as there is no transport I don't get home until three in the morning. (Interview Teresa, February 2006)

This conversation was added to by comments from Mirian who spoke of how she had failed to find any decent employment because of her age. A problem she saw as a result of the government who did little to support the poor who are the majority and in particular the women.

One has to look really hard for work so that they can survive. For example at my age no one will give you work anywhere. I went to the *Zona Franca* but they did not give me any work there. I even got a recommendation from Xilo (Auxiliodora) from the Communal Movement to go and work in a project up in the mountains but they also would not take me because of my age. They just like the young ones, the young girls and boys and they say that we [older people] can not do the work...and so that is how we all live barely surviving on the little that we can make from other activities...I think that it is important that they give work to older people as we are the ones who need it the most especially the mothers with families...really the only option left for us is to work for people with money the rich ones doing ironing and washing clothes. But they only pay us very little...that's why I am a *brigadista*, because I enjoy doing what I can. I like helping and working. I have worked for various organisations in this role and I work very hard...it is just that the government here works for the rich people and not for the poor majority. They know that many people are struggling to survive and still they do nothing. (Interview Mirian, February 2006)

Mirian also highlights the nature of voluntary work within the community. This type of employment can be empowering and gratifying, but at the same time it can be a burden on people's time and resources. Also it places people in a position of authority

over others meaning that rivalries and tensions may become more pronounced particularly where they involve leadership (as discussed previously). Interestingly NGOs are reliant on women to fulfil voluntary positions in the community, such as that of the *brigadista*, often without any physical incentive or reward being offered. Thus essential in the agenda of any NGO is encouraging voluntarism and developing positions which utilise and develop the skills of existing community members. More often than not in El Mirador voluntary positions are held by women, this is a consistent theme across Nicaragua as women generally are required to occupy voluntary positions. This is because consistently men are absent from the community in positions of paid employment, and more broadly linked to appropriate notions of masculinity and femininity as they are played out in Nicaragua. Thus largely the burden of voluntarism rests on the shoulders of women, meaning that to some extent the NGO is dependent on women in the community, just as they are dependent on the NGO.

Conclusion

The relationship between the Communal Movement and residents at El Mirador is marred by high levels of dependency. Arguably the direction of development has predominantly been dictated and controlled by the Communal Movement. The result being that the community's own resources and capacities have been undermined tarnishing the level of social cohesion that has achieved. The following chapter considers the importance of social capital as a means of advancing community development, and the areas where cohesion has been achieved and alternatively where tension still exists.

Chapter Four

Social Capital – Community networks, relations, tensions, successes and action

“Community development, when it occurs, is one part of a larger process of community change, Ecological, organizational, situational and other forces converge to structure and alter the relationships among people in a local setting, and random events also bring turbulence to the local arena.” (Flora et al. 2006)

Introduction

In El Mirador post Hurricane Mitch individuals and their families became distanced from all of their familiar social frameworks as they relocated to a new community. Thus community members faced not only rebuilding their homes and livelihoods, but also reforming social networks and relationships. This chapter explores the concept of social capital as it relates to community development in El Mirador, highlighting communal tensions, successes, gender relations and the part of NGOs in fostering and subverting social capital, and how this develops collective action.

Social Capital

While there is no fixed definition or methods of measurement in regard to social capital it can be thought of as the level of social interaction in individuals, groups and communities (Flora et al. 2006 based on the work of Putnam 2000 who expanded the definition to be inclusive of communities). This includes willingness to co-operate as individuals, the types of network and group behaviours exhibited and the overall level of community cohesion. As Bridger and Alter (2006) found social capital is essentially about connections based on reciprocity and trustworthiness. These relationships of reciprocity lead to a level of social trust where community action is possible. Social capital has been identified in research as an important resource which inherently leads to social action (Agnitsch et al. 2006). Thus like other forms of capital (e.g. human, financial, environmental), social capital can lead to improved outcomes for both individuals and groups. As Paxton states:

When social capital is present, it increases the capacity for action and facilitates the production of some good. When active, it facilitates ends for the members of a group and for the group as a whole (Paxton in Agnitsch et al. 2006: 38).

Thus the presence of some level of social capital can facilitate improved community outcomes and greater community prosperity. However the concept of social capital is not fixed or limited to acting by itself instead it functions most productively when in combination with other resources, thus it is interdependent. This is particularly important as social capital has the ability of being able to increase the efficiency of other forms of capital. As Cavaye describes:

Having the physical infrastructure or computers or specialized machinery is of little use without the human capital to operate them. Investing financial capital in a new business will be more efficient if there is the physical capital of existing infrastructure and the human capital of skilled employees. Likewise, social capital increases the efficiency of other forms of capital. A group with high levels of trust is able to be more efficient and can produce more than a group with low social capital (Cavaye in Agnitsch et al. 2006).

Thus communities which possess social capital are better able to make the most of opportunities and more readily able to mitigate negative outcomes.

There are two distinct forms of social capital, bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital is found in well connected groups, and is characterised by closed homogenous networks. Behaviours exhibited in communities which have bonding capital encourage dense inward identities within groups, strengthening small close knit relationships (Agnitsch et al. 2006; Flora et al. 2006). The second form is bridging social capital which is more heterogeneous, where different groups or people are connected together in the quest for resource acquisition. Thus enhancing the variety of resources available to the group and increasing connections between various groups, in turn reducing dependency (Agnitsch et al. 2006; Flora et al. 2006). Literature has argued that some level of both bonding and bridging social capital are necessary for successful community development (Bridger and Alter 2006). However, too much of one or the other can also negatively effect community development.

Tensions and rivalries

In the case of El Mirador the majority of residents came to the housing development with only their immediate family. As a result some interesting social interactions and patterns have developed. Most of the relationships are typified by the widespread sense of individualism held by community members. Most participants interviewed suggested that their families acted individually without reliance on other community members. Rosenfeld et al. (2005) suggest in their work on phases of disaster, post disaster individualistic tendencies are not uncommon as people become disillusioned by failures in aid and organisations, and the growing weakness of community ties. In fact many participants in El Mirador revealed that they had little or nothing to do with other residents. Some of this sense of individualism is derived from the fact that community members were unacquainted on arrival, came from diverse backgrounds and had few commonalities with other residents besides the fact that they were *damnificados*. As Raphael (1986) indicates dislocation and relocation post disaster place an acute stress on individuals, families and communities; as they cope with the physical and psychological scars of disaster while trying to re-create social networks of support and normality in new environments. Individualism is uncommon in Nicaragua as generally community is an extension of family, often relied on heavily for support. This lack of social cohesion has also persisted in the community, with many being poorly integrated despite numerous years of residence. This has also lead to many residents feeling displaced and threatened by the actions of other community members. Teresa describes the relationship she has with one of her neighbours.

For example, there are people who are not good, right? And some who are bad neighbours, but by that I don't mean that I don't get along with them. For example my neighbour on this side is terrible, terrible, as such I ended [the relationship], for me, I talk when it is a necessity. Do you understand? It's just, if I see him, [I say] "hi, how are you? good day, good afternoon". I don't bother him, and he doesn't bother me, there are many problems with various people, we don't get along, it is better to drop it because you have to live and work with these people. (Interview Teresa, February 2006)

Beyond the strong sense of individualism there are also many underlying tensions in the community. This includes the political division of Contra/Sandinista, (See Chapter

One) which remains a contentious division in many areas of Nicaragua. In El Mirador there is a specific area where ex contras live. The homes are all grouped together and they have little to nothing to do with other community members. Essentially they are considered strangers in their own community. Mirian in her capacity as a *brigadista* told how she had attempted to associate with these residents but had little success:

Well look, we tried to organise meetings and visits with those people [the contras] because they have lots of children and there are also many young girls who are pregnant there. We wanted to educate them about how to properly take care of their children, and to teach them about proper nutrition. However, only 4 or 5 women actually talked to us. They were very unsure of us and suspicious of why we were there. It seemed as though they were uncomfortable with us there, as such we have not gone back. (Interview Mirian, February 2006)

These tensions are also prevalent in the relationships between the original community residents who came as *damnificados*, and new residents who have recently purchased homes in El Mirador. New residents explained how they felt harassed and bullied by some community members who felt that they had rights over basic communal facilities and services such as water, since they had aided in construction projects and had lived in the community for far longer. They also suggested that there was a limited amount of interaction between themselves and the original residents, as they preferred to keep to themselves and their immediate families.

Generally I would say that people in this community are well behaved. The majority of people I know living here get along well without too many problems. However I only really know the people who are part of this project [Communal Movement], those who entered the community at the same time as me...I find it difficult to talk about the new people who have come recently because I have nothing to do with them, so I can't really say much about them. (Interview Isabella, February 2006 – original resident)

The original residents often viewed the new arrivals as usurpers who brought their homes cheaply, and as such did not understand the true value of the community. They were portrayed as often lacking in motivation in relation to community projects, and

as having little desire to fully integrate themselves into the community. This mentality by some residents has caused tensions to run high amongst new residents and original residents. Teresa explains how she was told that since she was new and had not contributed to the water project she did not have the right to collect water from the pump directly in front of her home.

...I have a pump in front of my house, but there are people in this community who say that the water is their water. And I say it is my water as well! But if I had a tube into my home I would not have this problem. (Interview Teresa, February 2006)

This is just one example of the “them and us” mentality in the community making it difficult if not impossible for any real forms of bridging social capital to exist. Thus while some groups may exhibit bonding social capital they lack the ability to source networks and resources from other groups, meaning that any sustainable long term community development is difficult.

Some of the newest arrivals in the community are squatters who have developed small settlements of one roomed houses constructed from, sheets of metal (see figure 4.1) and plastic, on vacant land. They too are outsiders in the community, seen as *campesinos* that are unacquainted with the way in which life in a city works. The original residents suggested that the squatters did not associate with them as the squatters were jealous and felt that they lived a glorified existence, with little understanding of extreme poverty and deprivation (Interview Rosa, February 2006). There is limited interaction between the residents of houses in El Mirador and the newly arrived squatters. Gabriela described the squatters as having different personality characteristics than other members of the community.

In the whole of the community there are different people. There are people who are good and friendly, while there are others who have different personality characteristics. One example are the people who are much poorer, they are different I think because they have far less possibilities and opportunities. (Interview Gabriela, February 2006)

Despite these differences some of the squatters gained employment amongst the residents at El Mirador, while others have actively taken part in social development programmes such as the health, hygiene, and sexual reproduction programmes implemented by the Communal Movement. Teresa employs a woman from the squatter settlement and she spoke compassionately about the difficult circumstances the women faced as a single mother living in poverty, and recognised the need for her to be supported. She says:

[t]o improve the community would require putting in a communal kitchen, because now in this community there are many poor people in need. For example the woman who helps me lives in poverty. She lives down there [squatter settlement] in a house which is not adequate and she is the mother of 7 children all of whom are young and she does not have support from anyone, and she needs support. (Interview Teresa, February 2006)



Figure 4.1

Small single roomed home constructed from metal at El Mirador

Rewa Tomlinson 2006

The success of social capital

However, despite this overwhelming sense of tension and individualism, the community has managed to develop some positive social networks; albeit aided and encouraged most often by outside agencies such as the Communal Movement. There is a strong health based network, wherein *brigadistas* are trained to identify illness and ailments among community members and to encourage them to seek medical treatment. They are also charged with conducting education surrounding appropriate sanitation for improved health outcomes, sexual health and reproduction, and the use of natural remedies for health purposes. This network works because it is a necessity, as the nearest *centro de salud* or hospital are large distances from the community whose members have limited means of transportation. As Isabella says:

[t]o improve this community I would introduce a *centro de salud*, because at the moment we have to travel a great distance to get to one and it is a long way if you are sick or have a sick child. I think health needs to be a priority in this community. (Interview Isabella, February 2006)

The *brigadistas* are called upon by most community members for advice when family members are ill. They also take time to visit individual families in an effort to educate them about health care. Generally the healthcare messages are simple such as encouraging parents to teach children to wash their hands after going to the toilet, and appropriately preparing and storing foods. Motivation around a common cause – in this case health care - can enhance social capital (Dhesi 2000; Moctezuma 2001; Raphael 1986). It remains important to recognise that this success of social capital is predominantly facilitated by the Communal Movement who has put in place the structural conditions required for productive forms of social capital to emerge. Isabella suggests that when the Communal Movement is involved in a project the community exhibits high levels of social cohesion.

There is lots of co-operation here in projects, whatever the cause. Whether it be going to meetings or actually doing projects, everyone contributes, even the new people. I

guess it would be difficult for people to say no, because we have all been doing it [contributing] for so long. (Interview Isabella, February 2006)

These same sorts of networks have also been seen in relation to security. When Cupples (2002: 287) visited the community in 1999 she noted that the residents of El Mirador had obtained electricity “by tapping illegally into the electricity supply.” However, since then El Sabadell has donated the money for the community to purchase the transistors and now most houses are legally supplied with electricity. The advantages of having electricity are innumerable including the ability to cook and have electrical appliances, but most importantly electricity has provided residents with a sense of security. They now have lights in their homes and in the streets making the community safer to be in after nightfall. In order to get electricity and street lighting, community members (with the help of the communal movement) lobbied the local *alcaldia* and El Sabadell, who have worked together to improve general access to electricity in the area.

Furthermore El Mirador is a geographically isolated valley on the outskirts of the city of Matagalpa, on the main road to Jinotega. Its isolation means that entry and exit points to the community have become a favourite place for robbery. Much of the robbery is accredited to bands of young boys who use the community as an entry point to Matagalpa. In the weeks before my arrival in Nicaragua several of my female participants had been robbed by these groups of *ladrones*, who held machetes to their throats and took jewellery and handbags (Informal conversations with Teresa and Marcella, February 2006). One of my participants even described to me how she could still feel the knife pressing against her throat, and explained how she thought that she was going to die there alone. She admitted that she had got lucky as one of the other community members (Isabella) had disturbed the robbery otherwise she did not doubt that that night would have been her last. Now two fully trained police officers live in the community, one of whom is the daughter of my participant Maria José. The presence of visible law enforcement has added to the sense of security in the community, however many women have formed their own small groups for personal protection especially when walking from the main road down to the community. They arrange meeting times and travel together both during the day and at night times. Plus

all the community members notify the law enforcement officers if they notice strangers loitering in or around the community.

For community members, concerns about security have provided a common point from which to develop active social networks, and although on some levels these networks are self serving, they do add to the level of cohesion and social capital in the community. Dhesi (2000) suggests that acting collectively in the interest of public good is seldom done as a selfless act but is more generally done so that individuals will personally gain support, status, honour rewards, or credit with their community which can be redeemed in the future. For the majority of women active in this security network the relationship is reciprocal, they provide a service of safe passage to other women with the intention that the favour will be returned in the future in a sense they build up social credits to be encashed at a later date.



Figure 4.2

Electricity transistor on home at El Mirador
(Rewa Tomlinson 2006)

Gender and social capital

In El Mirador gender is vital in understanding social capital. The community functions largely from the direction of women. Men are often absent for large periods of time in the community working outside of the area to generate income. For example Alejandro works as a teacher over two hours away from El Mirador, thus he travels daily for 4 hours to reach and return from his place of employment. He

described to me how often if he had to stay late for work he just didn't bother coming home at all, because it was such a long journey. Alejandro is not alone, as many men travel out of the city to find employment often only returning on their days off. Thus in the community there is a real focus particularly by NGOs, to develop strong networks of women who contribute to the community and work in co-operation. Many of the programmes designed for the community focus on making women productive members of society, for example the seamstressing course provided by the communal movement (see Cupples 2002), which aimed to provide women with the means to construct and sell home made garments. There has been a particular focus on getting women to rally around their rights (in relation to property, domestic violence, education) as a means of creating equality and trust in the community. Teresa describes the importance of women and men being equal land and property owners at El Mirador, a stipulation of the Communal Movement project.

...it was a good idea to construct these houses. They made them really well for a small family. The thing I like is that they put the houses in the names of the women. For example this house is in my name. It's just that sometimes men, not all of them are like this, but sometimes they can say this is my house and one can not have an opinion because it is theirs. In this case no! Our opinion counts, they [Communal Movement] have given value to us women. (Interview Teresa, February 2006)

Yet despite constant assertions by almost all of my participants that they were glad and proud of the fact that they owned their own properties outright, Communal Movement members revealed to me that recently many women had requested that their names be removed from the property titles and their partners or husbands name appear as the sole owner. When questioned by the Communal Movement as to why they wanted to remove their names most simply felt that it would make their home life and personal relationships easier. The Communal Movement however discouraged this practice and even refused to remove the name of one women who had persisted with the request for the ownership change (Informal conversation with Janet 2006). From the Communal Movement's perspective they felt women were being pressurised either directly or indirectly by their spouses and partners to change the ownership details. The reasons for this are predominantly socio-cultural as men often feel like it is their right or responsibility to be the provider and property owner

for the family. The difficulty is that in the long term women lose control over the property, meaning that should anything change in their relationship with their male partner or spouse, they run the risk of being homeless. By ensuring that there is equality in ownership the Communal Movement are mitigating possible future detrimental effects for women, and equally encouraging thought around gender relationships in terms of property ownership.

This area of conflict highlights two important issues. First the paternalistic way in which the Communal Movement dictates authority over community members (see chapter three) and secondly, the underlying gender tensions apparent in El Mirador. One particular incident occurred where a woman I met while in Nicaragua was taken to hospital to give birth. She had earlier that day prepared a meal for her partner should she go into labour, and had arranged for other family members to deliver meals to him on subsequent days she may need to be in the hospital. Due to complications in the birth she stayed in the hospital for an extra three days. I noticed that her husband had not eaten the whole time she was in hospital despite meals being prepared and warmed on the oven in pots waiting for him each day. When I asked him why he had not eaten he told me that it was because his wife had not physically served him his food, and he did not serve himself. He would not eat unless his food was dished up and presented to him on a plate by a woman. As he felt that a woman's place was to serve a man, and that it was unacceptable and unthinkable that he should place the food on a plate himself. For me this was a point of confliction as my background and upbringing lead me to feel that such behaviour was inappropriate. Despite these sentiments, I remained silent over the issue. However it does highlight some important issues surrounding gender stereotypes which exist in the community and more broadly in Nicaragua (see Bradshaw 2000; Cupples 2002 and 2004). The two major stereotypes operating in Nicaragua related to gender are *machismo* and *marianismo*. *Machismo* perpetuates traditional domineering tendencies by males as providers, and normalises social behaviours such as violence. *Marianismo* encourages maternal notions of self sacrifice amongst women, and encourages women to model themselves on images of the Virgin Mary.

The Communal Movement has emphasised gender in their development initiatives in the community encouraging and promoting women into positions of power within the

community and ensuring that women's rights are considered and met in relation to community development. However the distinct lack of supportive women's networks means that once again social capital and in turn collective action is minimised. Instead amongst women distinct individuals begin to emerge as leaders, whereby community members come directly to individuals to source information or resolve problems. These leaders control and direct development by addressing what they see are the primary concerns, and liaising with the appropriate organisation, be it the *alcaldia* or the Communal Movement. As such the voice of women in the community is mediated by a few select individuals, rather than coming directly from an organised group. Gabriela one of the few women in such a position of power spoke of her position in the community:

The majority of people come here [to her home] to ask for information, or to ask me a question about things they want to be informed about. It's just that I am a member of the *directiva* but not for the Communal Movement, for the *alcaldia*. It is called the *Junta Comunitaria*. (Interview Gabriela, February 2006)

There is a sentiment in the community that the leadership duties need to be shared more widely so as not to alienate residents, and to make sure that all community development initiatives are in the best interests of all community members. Rosa a resident of the La Luna housing project reveals how sometimes a person can begin to feel like just another body, or signature in the quest for community development:

They work in their own way in the manner that they see fit. If it is worth the effort they will do it. If not, then no...yes if the need a signature they look for us, if not they work in their own way, that's how it is at the moment. (Interview Rosa, February 2006)

Organisationally some of the younger residents are replacing older residents in leadership positions, as the emphasis for future development evolves and changes. The result is that a larger proportion of community members receive leadership training, and can suggest changes in areas where they see deficits, and better understand the importance of community development (Reunion consejo municipal

del MCN Matagalpa 21/01/06). Also more of the community can feel directly involved in community outcomes.

There is also now the emergence of sub-groups which have formed both on their own and with the influence of outside agencies. Through these smaller groups new leaders have emerged and more voluntary participation is exhibited by residents. A good example of this is the educational training in sexual health and reproduction, instigated by the Communal Movement. Community members have continued this educational campaign beyond the initiative outlined by the Communal Movement, meaning that more community members have been able to participate and benefit from this knowledge. A particular effort has been made with residents of the squatter community as a means of bridging barriers and working towards a common goal.

Mirian who is a *brigadista* shared with me how at first she often found it hard to speak with people from the squatter community about sexual health and reproduction, but that she quickly learnt that the difficulty primarily extended from her own inhibitions about speaking to others on a topic traditionally seen as taboo. Moreover she suggested that on many of the issues she found common ground and managed to work successfully to improve sexual health and reproduction outcomes for many members of the squatter community. She measured this success by the fact that some members had begun to work alongside her in other health based campaigns.

In regard to amongst issues related to children, women in the community exhibit some levels of cooperation. Infrastructural improvements to the community through the school have worked interactively with social capital meaning that forums for improving the future outcomes of gender in the community have been heightened. This is particularly important as social capital is a learned behaviour which is passed on from generation to generation through repeated actions which build up trust and norms (Dhesi 2000). Accordingly investments in social capital through the education of younger generations will positively promote future generations to form a level of social trust. The women work cooperatively to encourage the education of girls particularly in relation to the number of years they spend in the education system.

This level of encouragement has also been exhibited through the sexual health and reproduction education programmes where women have encouraged the active

participation of young women, in the hopes that messages about contraception, rape and sexual abuse, and HIV aids are taken into account. There are two key educational programmes relating to sexual and reproductive health firstly an adult education programme aimed at women, which considers women's rights and experiences, and secondly a youth education programme which deals with lifting the taboo surrounding discussing sex and reproduction, and education encouraging safe sexual practices. For many women these issues highlight areas in their own lives in which they hope that improvements will be made so that their children can have improved outcomes in the future. Some communities have had greater success in developing social capital post Hurricane Mitch, much of this success is because of the ability for residents to develop strong cohesive groups, organised around a common cause as is discussed in the following section.

High level of social capital

The community of El Hatillo, a rural village of Matagalpa provides an interesting contrast to El Mirador. Here community members showed high levels of social cohesion both prior to and post Hurricane Mitch accordingly they were better able to mitigate the effects of disaster and continued community development practices. El Hatillo is a rural village of 350 inhabitants in the Sébaco valley in Matagalpa, Nicaragua (Cupples 2004). Residents of this village also suffered from the damaging effects of Hurricane Mitch, losing possessions, livelihoods and homes.

El Hatillo was particularly badly affected by Mitch: the deep valley leading to El Hatillo had filled with water, drowning people who had hung on to trees for survival, and because the bridge and the road connecting El Hatillo to Sébaco were destroyed, vehicular access was only possible by driving through the river. Many houses were destroyed, household livelihoods were undermined by the loss of agricultural production, including the chickens and rabbits kept for domestic consumption, and 35,000 seedlings recently planted by the community in a reforestation project were washed away. The community was also forced to close its *comedor infantil*, the communal dining room run for all children under 12, as food supplies were destroyed and other more immediate needs became pressing. (Cupples 2004: 34)

Much like El Mirador, the residents of El Hatillo had been aided in the recovery process by the Communal Movement (Cupples, 2002). Immediately after the hurricane residents of El Hatillo found little support from the municipal or national government in terms of disaster response and relief. Accordingly they organised themselves into an emergency committee to bring in food and get out the sick and injured (Cupples 2002). The community of El Hatillo is an example of well organised social cohesion; as such they were better able to mitigate the effects of disaster (Cupples 2004). The community had agricultural cooperatives and well structured women's groups in place prior to the Hurricane. The advent of well established support networks in the community meant that members could capitalise on the aid given by NGO's. Accordingly their efforts in recovery have seen a more sustained approach to long term development and more efficient means of immediate recovery than in other communities in Nicaragua. The community has been able to enhance its level of bonding social capital, but more importantly various groups have worked constructively to combine resources (bridging social capital) in order to improve community outcomes. The result is that the community of El Hatillo has been less effected by aid dependence than El Mirador, and accordingly has directed its own community development rather than relying on the direction of outside agencies.

Collective action and mobilisation

The accumulation of social capital leads to collective action within communities. Since 1979 Nicaragua has been recognised as a country with highly mobilised citizens, dedicated to improving political and social conditions within the country (Black 1983). The Sandinista Revolution (1979-1983) epitomises the levels of political cohesion apparent amongst various citizens (see Chapter One). More recently, organisation against neoliberal structural adjustment reforms imposed by the government, World Bank and IMF, has added to this revolutionary culture of mobilisation, as a means of constructing a new alternative (Canner and Eames 1996; Klein 1995). At the forefront of these mobilisations are issues associated with insufficient social welfare systems, and high levels of poverty and vulnerability experienced by the majority of the population. Delaney and Schrader (2000) indicate that in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Mitch the population of Nicaragua exhibited high levels of social cohesion and mobilisation, however, they also suggested that if this type of community action is not captured and institutionalised it

will remain relatively short lived. Thus, as the Nicaraguan government post Mitch focused relief efforts on major infrastructural public works projects, citizens often became disillusioned and disorganised. While more recently NGO's have worked to encourage mobilisation around issues associated with employment, housing, water, and other basic needs. The revolutionary legacy of collective action in Nicaragua strengthens the current development focus that is centred on capacity building, from the bottom up. The development focus was on equipping communities with skills and resources that will provide sustainable long term development solutions. Many of the residents at El Mirador actively mobilised during the revolution and on subsequent issues since that time. In particular there has been a focus around issues relating to women, children, health, education and water within the municipality of Matagalpa (Reunion consejo municipal del MCN Matagalpa 21/01/2006). Although some of this communal mobilisation has been limited by high levels of aid dependency and reliance on outside organisations to 'fix' problems in the community. This has also meant that organisational structures have become disjointed with residents unsure of their positions, and often misunderstanding the importance of their individual roles. Lack of social capital (in various areas) has also played a part in limiting political capital in the community. On some issues the community has been able to develop community action. The recent negotiations and implementation of the community water project in conjunction with the *alcaldia* show that when combined around a common cause they can exhibit an adequate level of social capital to find collective action.

Conclusion

Social Capital is a vital concept in community development. Communities that exhibit high levels of social cohesion are more readily able to mitigate against negative outcomes and take opportunities to enhance community development as they arise. Central to social capital are the networks and relationships which form in a community. These networks and relationships have more potential to foster sustained development when they arise from the community rather than as a result of pressure from outside agencies. Examples of areas where this can be seen to be occurring in El Mirador are those of mobilisation around issues of crime and education. While the community of El Mirador does exhibit some behaviours that are conducive to building social capital, by and large internal distrust and discontent has limited the

levels of social cohesion achievable in this community. Looking to the future, added emphasis on developing strong gender based networks could prove useful in ensuring heightened social capital, particularly in relation to further educational enhancements. There is a continued need to work on the “them and us” mentality adopted by various residents, by enhancing levels of understanding and interaction in the community. Mirian’s efforts in the field of sexual and reproductive health in the squatter settlement, which resulted in some members working alongside her on other health based campaigns, provides an example of some unsettling of barriers between groups. Pressures of aid dependence and the lasting impressions of disaster have hindered the advancement of social capital. However on issues in which there is relative agreement, such as security and healthcare, the community has shown it has the ability to work constructively and in co-operation to improve outcomes.

Chapter Five

Conclusions and Research Scope

An Indian Tsar commanded that all blind men be gathered together, and when they were collected, he commanded that they be shown his elephant. The blind men went to the stables, and began to feel the elephant. One felt the leg; another, the tail; the third, the rump; the fourth, the belly; the fifth the side; the sixth, the back; the seventh, the ear; the eighth, the head; the ninth, the tusk; and the tenth, the trunk.

The Tsar called the blind men to him, and asked them: "What is my elephant like?"

And one blind man said, "Thy elephant is like a pillar." This blind man had felt the leg.

The second blind man said, "They elephant is like a broom." This blind man had felt the tail.

The third said, "It is like wood." This man had felt the rump.

The man who had felt the belly said, "An elephant is like lumps of earth."

The man who had felt the side said, "It is like a wall."

The man who had felt the back said, "It is like a hill."

The one who had felt the ear said, "It is like a handkerchief."

The one who had felt the head said, "It is like a mortar."

The one who had felt the tusk said, "It is like a horn."

The one who had felt the trunk said, "It is like a stout rope."

And all of the blind men began to dispute and quarrel.

Each of these blind men was telling the truth. An elephant is like a pillar, and like a wall, and like a rope. Yet, anyone depending on these blind men for a realistic description of an elephant will undoubtedly be misled and confused. An elephant, like a social problem, may be studied from more than one view point.

(Horton and Leslie 1974: 28-29)

Introduction

Research in many ways is a tiny reflection of the person I am and how I interpret various situations. Much like in the story of the blind men and the elephant the research reported in this thesis is one perspective, tinted and changed by my own views, interests, concerns, values, approaches and opinions. This research project has aimed to capture and project a small glimpse into the lives of residents at El Mirador, Matagalpa, Nicaragua and the ongoing challenge of community development. The goal was to analyse community development and transformation, through an evaluation of community cohesiveness, and NGO participation. Predominantly this thesis involves using the words of participants and observations to dissect seven years of community development, highlighting the ups and downs of NGO involvement and social capital.

While to date much of the physical and social development has been directed by outside agencies, there is scope for future infrastructural and societal changes instigated and lead by the community. An example of this is the transportation and roading improvements which have recently been negotiated between the community and the *alcaldia*. Such negotiations may prove to be an instigator for furthering other aspects of community development. However some concern still remains that the slow process of actually implementing changes while working with the *alcaldia* may discourage such ambitious projects in the future (The thoroughfares in the community are still insufficient and the drainage project is only partially complete).

The inability of the community to organise without the aid of outside agencies, such as the Communal Movement may mean that projects simply do not progress beyond the initial conception. As Howard (2004) indicates and I viewed through ethnographic observations in the field, the Communal Movement does encourage residents to take their concerns and ideas to the *alcaldia*. However, they still very much act as a referee between communities and local government and few ideas would go directly to the *alcaldia* without Communal Movement aid or input. Thus while the Communal Movement is frustrated at the lack of community cohesion, it must recognise that its tendencies to paternalism as an organisation encourage dependence rather than self reliance.

El Mirador is a complex site from which to examine social capital it is often difficult to establish whether organisation has occurred as a result of natural groupings and progressions in the community, or because of the influence of outsiders, or because of both these forms of social capital occurring simultaneously. While neither way is inherently better or worse than the other, it can change the dynamics of social capital, particularly in terms of the time period that the group remains collective and aligned to achieving the desired outcome. To date, building bridging social capital and mobilising various groups and resources has been the primary lack in terms of the community being proactive in establishing sustainable, long term community development goals and outcomes. Internal distrust and tensions have inhibited social trust and norms, in turn limiting social action. This has also meant that any spin-off projects have also been short lived.

Methodological Implications and Ethical Implications

While in Nicaragua I spoke at length with Communal Movement employees about the experience of travelling to a foreign country alone and adapting to cultural differences, and how some adapted more easily than others to such changes. They expressed to me their sadness and frustration when visits by foreigners were marred by misunderstanding and inability to adaptⁱ. For me these conversations really highlighted the intersubjective nature of research, where a researcher cannot simply go in and extract information impartially without personal prejudice or bias, but must in many ways co-jointly construct knowledge with research participants and find an adaptive, open medium of being aware of and attempting to understand cultural differences. At times this was a challenge, particularly because I often felt the desire to want to change things; to tell people that they did not have to accept certain situations. Thus the challenge I encountered was where do I (Rewa) as the researcher and I (Rewa) as the person begin and end, and to what extent do they overlap each other. At times I felt conflicted by emotions of wanting to help while not wanting to interfere.

Undoubtedly the heightened emotions of my research experience have played a part in weaving the rich tapestry that has become my thesis, and highlight what has been a critical turning point in my own perception of the research process. In my endeavour to embrace a qualitative methodology it was important for me to recognize that it is not wrong to feel conflicted and emotionally attached to research, but rather a part of the broader research process. The most important element is to be realistic and acknowledge areas where personal emotions may alter the way information is presented.

Ethical considerations throughout this research were also a very important. While in New Zealand some issues had been raised by the Human Ethics Committee of Canterbury University about the lack of information sheets and consent forms in this project. The reason information sheets and consent forms were not used was primarily because they were culturally inappropriate. Many of my participants were illiterate or had a limited educational ability, meaning they would have struggled to read and

understand all of the information being presented to them. Furthermore residents were wary about signing contracts without taking advice from advocates first. Also, such a practice is not typical in the Nicaraguan setting. The culture is very interactive and vocal and most information is disseminated by word of mouth, due to the nature of communities and lack of communication technologies. Therefore it is more culturally appropriate to disseminate information and gather permission orally. Accordingly the choice not to use information sheets and consent forms was appropriate in this setting. From past research experience in Costa Rica I knew that often people could not read the information being given to them, but felt intimidated or were too embarrassed to admit to an outsider that they were illiterate, or did not understand the information being presented. Instead, I chose to present all of the relevant information orally to all of the participants to ensure that they agreed to take part in the research project.

Often as a development researcher ethical decisions and considerations need to be made which may not concisely fit with the guidelines of ethical committees. This is a difficult point as it would have been more unethical in my opinion to have gone into the community and made participants sign consent forms when I knew that they could not read or understand what they were signing and agreeing to. I could have chosen only to interview participants who could understand the information being presented, but again, is this also unethical, to eliminate potential participants based on educational ability? After some negotiation I was granted ethical approval, but it does pose an interesting dilemma for New Zealand universities particularly as they develop and grow development studies programmes. Perhaps some new guidelines need to be set in place which, take into account the variances in research situations that occur, and how negative outcomes could be mitigated through putting more effort into developing 'ethical researchers', rather than focusing on ethical research policy.

Ethical decisions in the field are also note worthy at this point. In my preparation and proposals put forward to the Human Ethics Committee, I outlined that no gifts or incentives would be given to participants. However once in Nicaragua I spoke with members of the Communal Movement who suggested that a gift was not a necessity, but would be regarded as a generous token of appreciation for the time that participants spent with me. After learning about the community I decided that a small food parcel with staple items such as rice, beans, sugar and the like was the most

appropriate gift. The food parcel was appropriate in this setting, as food insecurity and nutrition were key programmes in the community. In fact the Communal Movement is considering reintroducing food programmes back into the community this year, and had already contracted funding to supply all of the school children with a glass of milk daily to improve nutrition. Thus the decision to thank people with a food parcel was an ethical decision I made in the field as it was the most appropriate decision in this setting.

Research Scope

Importantly as a researcher I recognise that I can not possibly have covered all of the aspects of community development in El Mirador, and in many of the areas which I have covered there still remains scope for continued research. Accordingly the following section considers the possibility for continuing various aspects of this research and the avenues beyond this research which could be investigated.

An interesting point that I discussed in Chapter Three was the idea that grouping victims together could add to the sense of dislocation and maintain a constant state of disruption in their lives. To date there is limited literature available on this topic, although consistently qualitative researchers have alluded to the possibility that such a feeling does appear to exist in some communities, and is extremely evident in places such as refuges and camps post disaster, particularly those which house victims for extended periods of time (Raphael 1986). One of the difficulties is how to define either qualitatively or quantitatively this sort of feeling in a community. For example: at what point should or do people lose the sense of feeling like victims and will they ever not be victims? Many of the questions raised by the issue of victimhood are somewhat difficult to answer, however they do provide a unique and interesting angle for future investigations. This is particularly so as these areas have links with other important areas such as poverty, gender and race grouping, and how categorising people can lead to various stigmas.

This research also opens up an opportunity to probe further into development practice as it is played out over an extended period of time. The majority of development projects are implemented and analysed over a specified period of time, sometimes weeks, months or years. While many indicate the desired long term outcomes for groups and communities as a result of development intervention, few return to assess

the actual result over a large extended period. Significantly, the return to this research site highlighted the similarities and changes in the community, noting how development initiatives that were just concepts in 1999 had progressed and were being seen in 2006. There is now space for continued analysis of this community in the future as it pursues further development goals.

Development implications and application

Much of the development in Nicaragua happens on a local level, in specific communities, women's groups, agricultural cooperatives and such like, however consistently development literature only incorporates macro level analysis of Nicaraguan development. Accordingly this research adds to the small but growing body of literature which incorporates local level analysis of development in Nicaragua. Specifically it looks at community development and the key elements necessary to develop El Mirador in the future. As Montoya (2003) argues there is a need for greater specificity in development literature, particularly in relation to Latin America, so as to avoid assuming homogeneity and thus making unfounded generalisations.

This thesis also agrees with more recent development literature in seeing that an interactional approach to community development is key (Bridger and Alter 2006). Many local conditions affect community development and some necessary prerequisites must generally be in place for the occurrence of community development, such as a level of trust and reciprocity (Agnitsch et al. 2006). However, in El Mirador limited community development has occurred despite relatively low levels of trust and reciprocity being present. Instead outside agencies have replaced the need for strong levels by mediating community interactions. As such, an approach to evaluating community development which incorporates all conditions present in a locality will enhance development practice and give a truer picture of how community development occurs.

Development practitioners working in similar situations need to carefully consider a variety of factors. Firstly recognition must be given to the capacities and resources present in the community prior to entry, as these will dictate the level of intervention needed by an aid agency, and also areas of deficiency. Timing needs careful

consideration as well, understandably most organisations are restricted by funding and specific time limits, however as in the case of El Mirador exit can become difficult. Accordingly having a specified time limit on projects may help organisations to remove themselves in a more efficient manor. This emphasis on time however does not mean that the development implications of projects should be restricted by time, instead they should focus on capacity building in order to ensure sustained long term development in specific communities. Many of the challenges in El Mirador have arisen from inefficiencies in social capital. As such a focus by development practitioners on developing cohesive groups will mean that people will be able to more readily combine capacities and resources to meet desired outcomes. They will also be better enabled to mitigate negative affects of the development process, and take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

Community development in El Mirador, Nicaragua is not simple or straightforward, but is instead a complex system of actions, interactions and interventions. As this thesis stresses choosing an appropriate community development strategy will depend largely on the local conditions present (Bridger and Alter 2006). Accordingly this research may be applied as a specific case analysis of the development situation in El Mirador, or alternatively the ideas presented can be used more generally to enhance understandings of community development, social capital and the role that NGOs play in influencing societal changes. The future of community development in El Mirador is tied to the success of greater collective initiative by residents and a diminishing influence by outside agencies. The potential for enhancement and change in the community remains enormous and only time will tell whether or not it is achievable.

¹ During my stay a small group of foreigners were also placed with other Nicaraguan families, some on research trips and others on country exchanges. Many of these visitors had become ill with dengue fever and malaria while in the country and consequently had become disillusioned with other aspects of their trips as a result. The difficulty for the communal movement was trying to make foreigners understand that what they were experiencing was a reality of life in Nicaragua, something that locals dealt with on a daily basis.

GLOSSARY SPANISH TERMS

<i>Aguas Negras</i>	Black water - Flooding
<i>Alcaldia</i>	Council
<i>Asemblea Nacional</i>	National Assembly
<i>Brigadistas</i>	Health educators
<i>Campesino</i>	Person from a rural area
<i>Casa Comunal</i>	Communal House - Meeting Area
<i>Centro de Salud</i>	Health Centre
<i>Champas</i>	Makeshift temporary housing
<i>Comedor Infantil</i>	Communal Kitchen – Children’s Kitchen
<i>Consejo Inter-municipal</i>	Inter-municipal Council
<i>Consejo Municipal</i>	Municipal Council
<i>Consejo Nacional</i>	Nacional Council
<i>Consejo Popular</i>	Popular Council
<i>Damnificada/s</i>	Female hurricane victim
<i>Damnificado/s</i>	Hurricane victim
<i>Directiva</i>	Neighbourhood Council
<i>Equipo Coordinador</i>	Coordinating Team
<i>Frijolero</i>	Street seller
<i>Junta Comunitaria</i>	Community Board
<i>Ladrones</i>	Thieves
<i>Machismo</i>	Latin American male trait
<i>Marianismo</i>	Latin American female trait
<i>Muros</i>	Retaining Walls
<i>Pulpería</i>	Local store
<i>Urbano</i>	Small bus/shuttle

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APPENDIX A

1. Personal Information

- Name
- Age
- Sex
- Status
- Children
- Address

2. Community

- When did you come to live here?
- Why did you come to live here?
- Who did you come with?
- Where did you come from?
- What was your previous community like?
- What do you like about living in this community?
- What do you dislike about living in this community?
- How has the community changed since you first came to live here?
- Do you have friends or family living in this community?
- What organizations (e.g. NGOs) work in this community?
- How much influence do outside agencies have in this community?
- Who makes the decisions in the community?
- What communal facilities are there in this community?
- Who uses the communal facilities?
- Who funds and builds these facilities?
- Do you interact with other members of the community? Who? How?
- Are the people living in this community the original inhabitants?
- What programmes are run in this community?
- Who runs them?
- How do these help/not help the community?
- How long did it take to build this community?
- Are you still building this community?

3. Housing

- Did you help build this house?
- Who helped to build this house?
- What were your previous dwellings like?
- How long did it take to build this house?
- How many people live in this house?
- What services (power/water etc) are available in this house?
- What do you like/dislike about this house?
- Do you feel safe in this house? Why? Why not?

4. **Gender Relations**

- In your family which jobs around the house does each family member do?
- Which family members contribute to the household income? How?
- Who makes the decisions about the family?
- Do you take part in community projects? Which projects? Is this voluntary?
- What do you get out of the projects?
- Are there different jobs for men and women?
- Are men and women equal in this community?
- Who are the decision makers in this community, men, women, both?
- What community groups are present? Are their member's men or women?
- What issues are faced by men in the community?
- What issues are faced by women in the community?
- What issues are faced by children in the community?
- Do you feel that women and men have equal rights? Why? Why not?
- Does the communal movement treat women and men equally? Why? Why not?
- How do women contribute to this community?
- How do men contribute to this community?
- Are the relationships between men and women in this community better than your previous community? How?

5. **Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation**

- How did HM affect you?
- Were you prepared for the Hurricane? Why? Why Not?
- Are you prepared if another Hurricane hits? How?
- Is this community prepared if another Hurricane hits?
- What measures have been taken to prevent damage from a Hurricane OR other natural disaster?
- Who teaches the community about natural disasters?
- Did the disaster relief efforts help you?
- Were they delivered quick enough?
- How did you help with disaster relief efforts?

6. **Family**

- Tell me about your family
- What was your family like before, during and after the hurricane?
- Do you have a small or a large family?
- Are you close to your extended family?
- How important is family to you?
- Does your family like living here?
- How has your life changed since you and your family came to live here?
- How has your family life changed since you came to live here?
- Do you have more or less contact with your extended family since coming to live here?

- Is this a good or a bad thing? Why?

7. **Education, Employment, Health**

Education

- What level of education do you have?
- What levels of education do your family members have?
- Is there a greater opportunity for increasing your/your family's education now? Why? Why not?
- How important is education?

Employment

- Do you contribute to the family income? How?
- Do you work in the formal or informal workforce?
- Do you work locally? OR do you travel to work?
- Is employment/income easier or harder to find since moving? Why?
- Do you make more or less money since moving?
- Do you spend more or less time working since coming here? Why? Why not?
- What kinds of employment are available here?
- Are these kinds of employment similar to those available in the rest of Nicaragua?
- Are there different kinds of employment for women and men?
- Is it easier for men or women to find employment? Why?
- Do men or women make more money?

Health

- What mental or physical health concerns arose after the Hurricane?
- What are the health concerns in this community now?
- In general has the level of health increased or decreased? Why?
- Do you discuss health care issues in the community?
- Who is in charge of Health Care?
- Is Health Care affordable?
- What specific health concerns affect, women, men, and children?
- How is the community combating these health concerns?

8. **The Communal Movement**

- In what ways is the CM involved in this community?
- Do they have a positive or negative effect on the community?
- What projects is the CM involved in, in the community?
- Is the CM more or less involved in the community than immediately after the disaster?
- Does the CM work well in this community? Why? Why not?
- How effective are the CM's projects in this community?
- What level of help does the CM provide?

- Would you like to see more or less involvement by the CM?
- Does the community like the influence of the CM?
- What changes would you like to see made by the CM in the future?
- What projects would you like to see?
- Do you think the CM is effectively dealing with the important issues in this community?
- What role does the CM have in decision making in this community?
- Could this community function without the CM?